

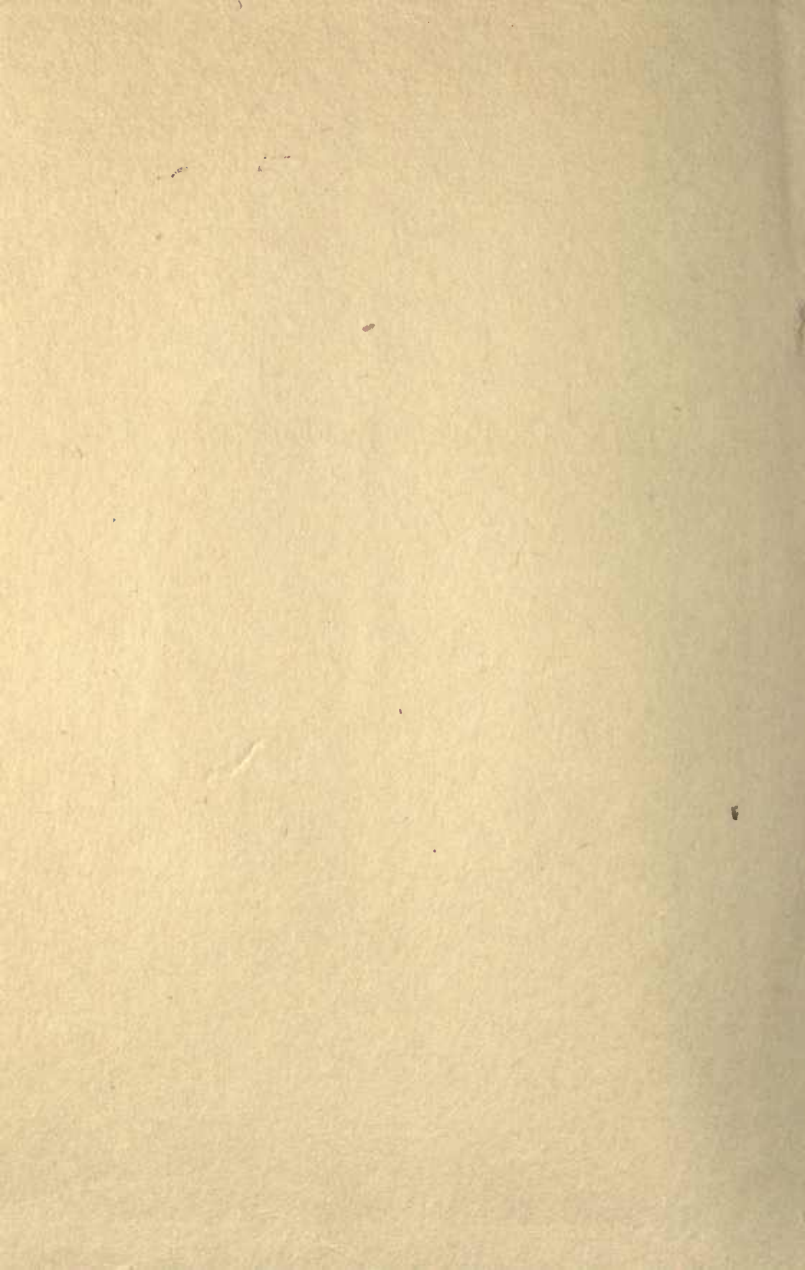
Merry Christmas
to

Mary Winchell Ryan
from

Aunt Mary -

1924

25



THE RAIN-COAT GIRL

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The two figures halted opposite the door and talked a minute in low tones.

THE RAIN-COAT GIRL

BY

JENNETTE LEE

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK : : : : 1922

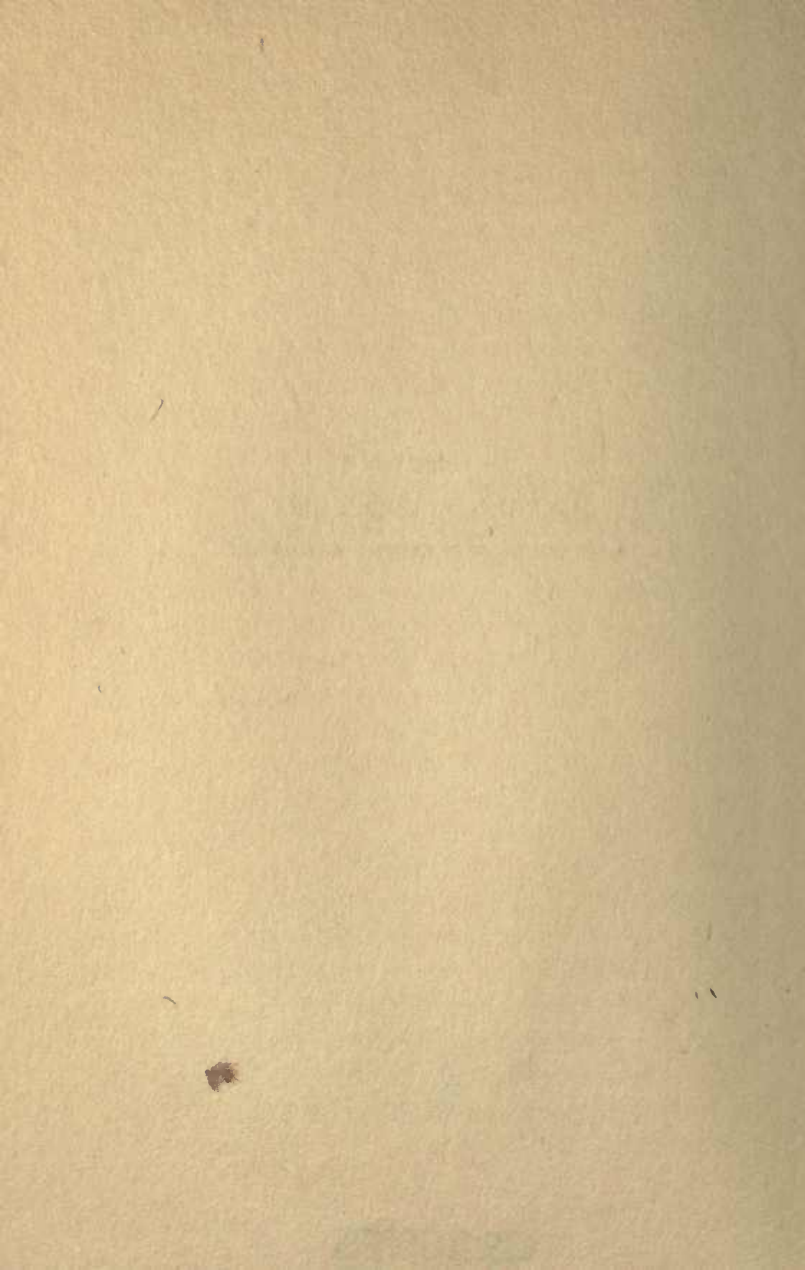
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TO
GERALD STANLEY LEE
HAVE WE NOT HALF ETERNITY BEFORE US?

2136875



THE RAIN-COAT GIRL

I

THE child raced home through the storm, her head bent and her short swift legs flying fast. To the south great thunder-heads formed, and a gray-green sky shut out the light. The down-bent face glowed with the joy of the race. Tingling forces were about her, and she tossed her head a little, throwing back the escaped lock that teased her eyes like a pony's forelock. She was not unlike a young colt racing through the storm with her short swaying body and the stout little legs spudding along. Her breath grew quick. Her heart drummed to the rhythm of her flying feet, and the first drops of the storm spirted and stung at her. A long slanting gust whirled by, drenching her head and shoulders, and she ducked to it and tossed back the lock from her eyes. . . . She was almost home—two more fields, then down the hill and into the side street! . . . A glare lit up the sky and crashed the world about her. She lifted a startled face. Over the top of the hedge beside her she saw the windows of the great house on the hill lighted up and a woman's white face peering out. Then the gray-green mist shut down. The hedge beside her was brilliant with wet, the gutter ran brown. She shook the drops from her hair and sped on.

An opening broke the hedge, and between the greenness a wide straight driveway led to the house. At the end of the drive a woman was coming swiftly down the steps of the house.

She beckoned to the child with imperious hand.

"Come in here out of the rain!" she called.

With a startled glance the child hesitated. Then she swerved into the opening between the wrought-iron gates and trotted up the driveway to the house.

The woman on the white-pillared porch reached out a hand and drew her to the door. They stepped within and a great crash descended on them behind the closed panels. The woman gathered the child in her arms crushing her almost fiercely. The child submitted impassive. There was a bewildered look in the dark eyes gazing out of the encircling arms at the great hall and the wide stairway rising from it.

The woman released her with a quick gasp, but her hands seemed to linger on the sturdy shoulders and wet hair, smoothing them——

"Come in here," she said. "You are wet through!" She led the way into the long room at the right where a fire glowed on the hearth, and placed her before it, drawing off her shoes and wet stockings with quick touch. Her hands held the pink swinging feet a moment, pressing them gently.

She was kneeling before the child, looking up.

"What is your name?" she asked quickly.

"I am Isabel Merton," said the child gravely.

"Isabel—Isabel!" murmured the woman half-crooning. "Isabel and a pot of basil!"

The child stared down at her. She had never heard the word basil. Years afterward when she encountered it in a high Gothic library, a grown-up girl, she saw suddenly the rain-drenched windows and a woman's sombre eyes looking up at her from the fire——

She bent down to her feet, looking at them half-askance. "They are not so very wet!" she said.

"No." The woman crushed them suddenly between her palms and let them go. She got to her feet.

"Stay here till I come." She vanished through the open door, and the child's eyes studied the great room— Pictures on the high wall. A soft brilliant rug beneath her feet. Wherever the firelight played it brought out glowing color. It ran along the burnished edge of the table and touched the strange-shaped lamp and played on rows of books. They stretched away in the dimness, and the child's eyes followed them curiously. She had never been in a room like this. But she felt suddenly at home in it and surrounded and protected.

The fuzz of the soft rug tickled her feet deliciously. She drew them up one after the other to the rung of her chair. After a minute she put them quickly down, working her toes absently back and forth in the soft pile. Her eyes still strayed about the room—not boldly, but unafraid, as if each object they touched were strangely familiar to her. . . . She breathed slow and deep, resting back in the big chair before the fire. Something was coming to

life in her, groping for shape—it lighted her face and the shy eyes glancing about the mysterious room.

The eyes turned aside to the doorway and smiled. The woman stood in it holding a child's coat in her hands. She came forward to the fire holding it out.

"This will keep you dry and warm," she said. She spread it on a chair before the fire where the short stockings had been drying and took the stockings drawing them thoughtfully through her fingers.

She knelt on the floor by the child.

But the child slipped quickly from her chair. She plumped down on the rug.

"I can put them on," she said practically.

The woman relinquished them to her, half reluctantly, and sat with her hands in her lap watching a little wistfully while the child drew on the stockings and snapped the fasteners in place with quick skill and laced the clumsy shoes.

"You do it very well," said the woman, and the child nodded. She was bending over the lacing of a shoe, wetting it with her tongue where the brass tip was gone. She slipped the wetted end skilfully through the hole and tied the knot and got to her feet. Then she looked slowly about the great room.

"I'll have to go now."

The woman sighed a little. She got up and took the coat in her hands. It was a plaided cape coat,

deeply-rich in color with a single thread of scarlet running through the plaid.

She held it out to the child, who regarded it with doubting eyes. She gave a quick shake of her head——

“It’ll get all wet!” she said slowly. She motioned to the window where the steady rain poured down.

The woman smiled faintly in the firelight. The shadow and light of the room seemed to play through her face.

“That is what it is for,” she said, “to get wet. It is a rain-coat.”

The child’s arms inserted themselves slowly in the sleeves and her hand stroked the rich surface as the woman drew it up about her neck and shoulders.

“Won’t it hurt it to get wet!” she asked wonderingly.

“Not a bit!” The woman shook her head. Her lip trembled. She drew the coat in place and smoothed it and buttoned it slowly to the neck.

The child stood with lifted chin, gazing about the room. The woman drew the hood over her damp hair and tucked back the little forelock. Something in the touch drew the child’s eyes to the face bending down to her and she suddenly lifted a quick hand to her throat, pulling at the hooks——

“I mustn’t take your coat!” she said. But the woman put back the hand quietly.

“I want you to take it. Tell your mother I haven’t any little girl to wear it, so it is yours. . . .

It fits you perfectly. It seems made for you!" She smoothed the coat with lingering touch. The child glanced down at it gravely.

"It is yours!" said the woman. She did not touch the child again. She only watched her with deep eyes as she went from the room, through the hall, down the long driveway—the little bright coat flapping in the wind.

At the gateway the child paused between the iron pillars and lifted her hand from beneath the cape and waved it to the woman standing in the doorway. Then she turned, and with down-bent head and flying legs sped on down the hill through the rain.

As she trotted down the long slope of the hill she saw below, through the rain, the gleaming roofs of the town among the wet green trees. Two spires rose piercing the rain. . . . Then as she looked ahead, the gloom of the rain seemed lifting. It was drawn up—clouds of light swept over wet roofs—a clear soft brightness was in the air. . . .

And suddenly the child stopped with a gasp, looking up——

There in the sky hung a thing of wonder. It arched above the roofs and the two spires—in soft brilliance. The rainbow arch spanned the sky above the town in the trees.

She stood alone, gazing. For the first time in her child life she saw a bow in the sky.

She was alone. . . . No one to explain the miracle—a pot of gold at either end—a bow of promise—drops shining through the sun. Only the splen-

did beautiful Thing there swung high in the arch and her child-heart lifting to it till she caught her breath and ran on down the hill, awed and happy.

The thin silvery threads of rain fell on her as she ran.

And the little coat kept her dry.

II

SOMETIMES her typewriter took only one lobe of her brain, and with the other she would see herself vividly the day she came running home through the storm and burst in upon her mother with the glow of the coat wrapped about her—and her mother's startled unrecognizing glance turned to her——

“Who—! What——?”

And then the stern pale voice.

“What are you doing in that coat! Take it off this instant! Where did you get it?”

And the child's face uplifted—the tears mingling with the rain on it. . . .

“It's mine!—My coat!” passionately. “A lady gave it to me!”

“Take it off!—I tell you! We are not paupers!”

And she had watched her mother dully, when the storm was over and the trees were glistening with wet, take the coat on her arm and walk quickly down the path to the street. She watched her with her thin and shrunken shoulders under her ill-fitting black cloak—till she passed out of sight down the street.

But when her mother returned she still carried the little coat on her arm. And it seemed to Isabel that her face looked strange. She had not known her mother's eyes were like that. . . . She watched her carry the coat into the bare back entry and

hang it with the others on a hook and come back. Her eyes still had the strange look she had not remembered was in them. . . . It flashed suddenly to the sombre eyes of the woman on the hill and in both faces the child saw something unknown—Something that beckoned to her vaguely. She leaned forward.

“Can I wear it, mother?”

Her mother rattled a stove-lid a moment. Then she looked up with dull face.

“You can wear it when it rains,” she said.

But the child wore it every day and its warmth wrapped her about.

She was six years old when the little rain-coat came to her. Sitting before her typewriter in the office of John Berwick and Son taking swift notes or copying them out, it sometimes seemed to her looking back that all the years of her life had been lived since the day the coat came.

She had hurried to school in it skipping a little, tossing her head and running in the spring wind. The group at the door brought her to a halt.

They drew aside—Whispers came to her and half-giggled words—that left her breathless.

“Bessie Berwick’s coat!”

“Hs-sh! . . . She’s dead!”

A tremor ran through the child. The mystery of the coat and the slighting glances seemed to meet in her and crush her between them. Then she lifted her head and stared back across the gay soft collar of the little coat.

They turned their curious important backs on her and whispered. She longed to press in among them. But she stood outside and waited, her head lifted and her gaze fixed on the whispering backs and nodding heads. Something in the coat seemed to give her courage.

When the bell rang and they hurried in she took off the coat slowly and hung it on a nail in the entry beside her dinner-pail, and went in feeling dully that she left something of herself hanging there on the nail.

She wore a blue denim dress and stout cheap shoes. Her mother made all her dresses—two each spring exactly alike with wide hems and tucks to let down and tucks in the sleeves. She wore them until they were worn out, faded and threadbare. But they were always clean.

Sitting in her seat, her head bowed above the arithmetic with its pictures of pears and apples and cherries and grapes——

Three in a row——

Five in a bunch——

Her mind hovered about the entry trying to recover its lost glow. And for the first time she knew that her dress was ugly.

But in the entry on its nail hung the gay little coat and in spite of nudging looks her heart sang over her arithmetic. The pictures of numerical fruit were works of art and the rows of figures, shining cabalistic signs. . . . At recess the girls took her in. They let her play with them, and Ella Fried-

man the leader walked down to the gate and back with her arm around the waist of the little plaid coat. . . . She was only a little girl in a shabby denim dress, but the coat and the mystery of the coat—something of the child on the hill and the love the coat was made with—seemed to cover the denim dress.

They even let her lead in their games that day, and the strangeness of it made her shy and a little unhappy at first. She had always followed where the others led. Now when they turned to her suddenly and asked: "What let's play?" a little shiver ran through her.

Even in summer when she had left off the coat and the blue denim was more faded and ugly than ever they still turned to her as leader.

And now she did not mind. The little rain-coat had got her started not being afraid and her spirit bubbled with it. Gay little plans shaped themselves in her head. Quaint conceptions that the other children did not seem to have. Sometimes she stroked the coat where it hung in the closet or she buried her face in it for a minute drawing in her breath sharply with closed eyes. There was a curious smell to the rainproof cloth that set her blood tingling. The odor seemed to sweep her along through the rain—along by the hedge into the house on the hill where the woman with the white face waited. . . . The woman on the hill was not there any more.

Only John Berwick and his son lived in the big

house now. John Senior and John Junior they were called in the works.

It was almost time for John Senior to come in and dictate——

She glanced up at the clock over his desk. Her fingers hurried on— The left lobe of her brain went back softly to the morning she heard her mother and the neighbor talking together mysteriously by the sink in the kitchen. The neighbor had brought in a tea-cup, but it stood unheeded on the table.

She bent to the sink and half-whispered the words——

“They say it was. . . .” Then her voice sank and her eye glanced back at the child.

“Run away, Isabel!” said her mother sharply. And the child went slowly out but the words followed her—whispered and strange——

“Dead before they could get to her——”

It was years before she knew what the words meant.

She only knew the word dead went with the coat. It subdued its gayness and deepened its mystery and became part of her life.

She drew out the sheet from her machine and laid it in place and straightened her shoulders and glanced again at the clock. She had been copying since nine. It was nearly eleven. John Senior was late.

III

HE came in—a stout man with short neck and short fingers scrupulously clean. He wore a checked suit of dark material, a little red and green stripe running through it. The checks were small. There were men in the works who could remember when John Berwick wore checks that were two inches across.

That was before John Junior came back from Europe.

He crossed to his desk and sat down and nipped a little at the knee of each trouser.

“I’m ready,” he said.

She got up and came over.

“Where is Fannie?” He glanced sharply at a covered machine by the window that looked out on the street.

“She went away over Sunday,” said Isabel. “Her train missed connections. There is a telegram on your desk. She will be back on the two-ten she says.”

He grunted and pushed the telegram aside with his finger.

“I’ll have to use the dictating-machine. Hate it!”

“Yes, sir.” She waited, her pencil uplifted. At the first word of the dictation it fell to the paper and moved with the smooth precision of a machine along

the page of her note-book. John Senior's voice was gruff. Some of the words he dictated were peculiar. The pencil transcribed them smoothly. When the copy came to his hand he knew the emphasis of the words would be kept, but the roughness would be gone. . . . John Berwick valued Isabel's work. She had been steadily promoted since she came to the mill six years ago. John Berwick knew efficiency when he met it. The success of the firm was built up on efficiency—the efficiency of employees. But he had no use for the modern science of efficiency in business. He ran his business on a common-sense basis. He was fond of saying this.

Isabel Merton sometimes said that John Senior's bark was worse than his bite. She had learned this through two years' free translation of his language.

When he had dictated steadily for half an hour he paused and sighed and wiped a hand across his forehead.

"Well, you've got all you can handle there. I'll do the rest into the machine." He got up with a scowl and went toward the door. And presently through the closed door she heard his irascible voice shouting into the machine. She knew he was dictating and she knew that the language would be a little worse than usual. It would require tact. She smiled happily. Her fingers flew at the keys.

She liked to copy for John Senior.

For a time there was only the click of the keys and the rasping voice through the closed door girding at the machine and grumbling on.

The square blank room with its dead white walls and six windows let in a flood of light. There was a large desk with a chair before it, two typewriters, four chairs, and a table and a waste-basket. The two stenographers used one work-table between them. There was no other furniture in the room and no rug on the floor. John Berwick did not believe in waste or clutter. But the stenographers were well paid—as girls' work goes. You do not expect to pay a girl as much as a man. It is not common sense.

The girl's presence in the bare room was like a touch of spring—a bit of arbutus—a fragrant pink flower thrust carelessly into a stiff cardboard box and shining through folds of wax or tissue paper—a bird-song caught in the phonograph and turned out with a crank—a bit of pulsing life bound to routine. . . . The soft clear color of her skin glowed against the rough serge dress, and the glints in her hair caught the light and shimmered with it. The glinting light in the room seemed to play about her subtly as if her flying fingers drew electric force from the keys and cast it in swirling invisible streams on the air about her.

The six windows were open and murmurs of sound came in—the distant whirr of cars and clanging of bells that jarred faintly. Across the windows flitted vague shadows of flying wings. And now and then a bird-song drifted in flute-like. Spring was in the air. She lifted her face to it and then to the clock.

The door from the hall opened. A young man

came in. He glanced at the typewriter and closed the door.

"Father in?" he asked.

The sound in the room beyond that had been silent a minute broke out anew.

She moved a shoulder toward it. The young man laughed out. The harsh voice seemed to pause a second and go on grimly.

The young man stood by the desk looking thoughtfully at the papers heaped on it. His face bent over the papers was thin, almost gaunt, and the lines of the cheek bones and wide forehead gave it the suggestion of a sketch—a rough outline of a face—blocked in but not filled out. The tall loose frame in its well-cut clothes went easily into the picture, and the eyes studying the papers with a little humorous glance belonged in it—but back of the humor brooded another look. Something oddly at variance was in the eyes as they glanced up at the girl. She was not looking at him. Her fingers seemed to snatch the words from the keys in swift rhythm and the glinting head nodded to them. He watched her a minute quietly.

"Busy all the morning?" he asked.

"Yes—Fannie's off." Her fingers did not cease their play and she did not look up.

He fidgeted a minute with the papers. "You couldn't help me then?"

"At twelve, perhaps."

"That's luncheon—you ought not——"

"I don't mind." She said it happily and drew

out the paper and held it off and inserted another. He might have been a shadow flitting across the window, the whirring cars on the distant street. Her eyes were absorbed.

"Very well." He selected one or two papers from the pile on the desk. The door of the inner room opened quickly.

"Hello, John!" His father nodded and came over. He looked at the papers the young man held in his hand and nodded again.

"That's right! Take them along—all of them. This too!" He thrust another at him. "Got our hands full to-day." He pushed up his cuffs and cleared the space for action. The young man withdrew smiling a little humorously. At the door he glanced back. The glinting head was bending to its work. She had not noticed he was going. His hand on the knob turned it with quick grip and he went out.

Across the room John Senior paused a minute in his work. His eyes, small and round and paternal and thoughtful, rested on the brass knob. They turned to the unconscious girl and rested on the glinting head.

"Most through, Bel?"

"Yes, sir." Her eye sped along her notes.

"I'll wheel in the machine then. You can copy in here— Better light."

John Berwick was careful of his employees as a good farmer is careful of cattle. He did not need any modern efficiency expert to tell him that it pays

to take good care of your stock and tools. He knew that, before the expert was born or thought of. Any sensible man knew it! . . . Especially when help was as valuable as Bel Merton you are careful of it. He came trundling the machine before him and rolled it alongside her.

She looked up with a nod. "Thank you," she interpolated between the dabs at her notes and hurried on. He grunted.

"Better stop now. 'Most twelve."

She glanced swiftly at the clock. "I'm going to help Mr. John Junior at twelve." He stared resentfully.

"He can't have you to-day!"

She smiled a little and gathered up her papers. "I'll take it out of lunch-hour. You don't mind that?"

"No—" he grumbled. "But not more than twenty minutes, mind you!"

"All right!" She handed him the sheaf of papers and he went out.

She looked about the big bare office with a happy smile and stretched her shoulders a little and looked at the window where the clouds sailed high. . . .

Spring in the air!

IV

IN his own office John Junior paced back and forth with loose swinging step. It was a large oblong room with a recess at one end where a wall had been taken down to let in the small room behind. John Senior had consented to this when the young man came home from Europe. He was haunted by the fear his son would go away again and never return. To prevent this he was willing to sacrifice good floor space.

John Junior had been travelling in Europe in the summer of 1914. When the war broke out he enlisted in a Canadian regiment, but was wounded and returned home. He had been rejected by his own war office when the country declared war. And there was little prospect he knew ruefully that he would be in Europe either as traveller or soldier for years to come. . . . He paced the floor space from end to end. He knew exactly the number of steps. There was a little path worn in the Wilton rug where he had measured them off. John Senior had marked the path with disapproving eye the first day he discovered it—just beginning in a faint line of gray. . . . Still a path is a path—and not Europe. A new Wilton rug could be bought for fifty dollars. Meantime the path grew deeper. It widened a little.

John Junior murmured inaudible words as he

paced back and forth on the rug. . . . He paused at the window and looked up at the sky. Spring clouds sailed in it.

“High—my—lie—die. . . .” he murmured. Then he threw himself with a faint laugh into the chair by the desk. . . . Why should a human being be driven like this! . . . Words and tumult—trying to get together—trying to get out! He whistled softly. He looked toward the window and his brain took up a new rhythm beckoning to him coaxingly.

There were chenille curtains at the windows, terra-cotta in color, and the couch between the windows was covered by a curtain of the same color. The curtains had fringes on them and there was a fringe on the yellow silk lamp-shade that concealed the electric bulb on the desk. The desk was dark, antique oak. All the furniture in the room was dark. The pictures on the walls were photographs of famous paintings or ruins. The largest was a Braun photograph—Mona Lisa smiling on a foolish world. . . . On the window-sill were three scarlet geraniums in pots. They were in full bloom and very bright and lusty.

The young man’s eyes dwelt on the geraniums while his lips murmured vague words. The eyes scowled on the geraniums as if they pained him. Then he turned his head. The rhymes vanished. He smiled quickly. There was a light tap on the door.

“Come in!” he called. He got up. “Come in, Miss Merton.”

He was standing with his long fingers pressed down on the desk, gazing at her kindly.

She crossed to the window by the geraniums and sat down. The light behind her glinted out around her hair.

He blinked a little and seated himself. He reached a careless hand to a drawer and took out a handful of notes and ran them through his fingers.

She waited with calm pencil.

"This is a poem," he said. He selected it and held it off. "Poetry but not rhyme," he added kindly. "You understand— I'll tell you when the lines end."

She nodded and raised her pencil. He began to read with a low musical intonation that seemed to draw the words from the air and light about them and weave them into a mood. The girl's pencil moved swiftly.

The only break in the musical rhythm was a halt on each fifth accent and the crude word "end." It fell with a thud into the even rhythm that strove to sweep past it. It blocked the flowing words.

He paused in irritation and looked at her, a little line between his eyes.

"I think I'll tap on the desk," he said, "instead of saying 'end.'" She nodded coolly.

"You will get used to it after a minute," he said kindly.

"I don't think I need it anyway," she replied. "It seems to go along easy."

His eyes glowed at her and his voice took up the lines and swung them rhythmically and her pencil

caught them in little lines and curves and fixed them in place. His look grew rapt. The pencil flew fast. The spring light filled the room. . . . He paused and drew a hand across his eyes.

"That is all—all I have finished," he said regretfully. The pencil made a note.

"Now this one," he selected a paper and held it off. "This has rhymes and stanzas. It is to a young girl. . . . I call it 'To Lydia'——"

"What time is it?" she asked practically. There was no clock on the wall of John Junior's room.

He felt for his watch, groping, his eye on the lines. The eye dropped to the watch face——

"Twelve-forty," he said absently.

"I'll have to go." She slipped a band about the notes and got up. "I'll copy this to-night—or to-morrow. We are rushed to-day."

She moved to the door.

"Triple-space, please," said John. She nodded.

Then she was gone, and John looking out between the chenille curtains murmured softly:

"High—lie—dry." A bird's wing came between the inaudible words and the sky and he frowned at it. He got up and went to the window. A car had driven up below. His father was beckoning to him.

He muttered softly and looked for his hat and went out.

V

BACK in her office Isabel uncovered her machine and looked thoughtfully down at the notes she had made for John Junior.

She shook her head and covered up the machine and put the notes in her drawer. She had promised John Senior she would work only twenty minutes and it was thirty-five already. It was not fair—when John Senior did not grumble. She must be fresh for his work when he came back. The blank verse could wait. She would copy it to-night after hours.

She went to the closet across the room and brought out her lunch-box, a tin box covered with black canvas. There was a mirror in the closet hidden behind the dust-cloth, and she took it out and smoothed and arranged her hair and patted the collar of her dress with swift efficient hands. Then she put the mirror back behind the dust-cloth covering it carefully. . . . There had been three mirrors before this that had mysteriously disappeared. John Senior disapproved of prinking and flummery. But he had never thought to look behind the dust-cloth. She carried her luncheon to the window and took it out. There was bread and butter and jelly, with a piece of cheese and a bite of sausage and a large banana. She spread them on the sill and ate slowly looking from the window up at the transparent blue

sky and down to the crowd of girls laughing by the fence below. They were talking and strolling back and forth.

Isabel sometimes joined them by the fence—when she had time. But to-day would be full. She ate happily looking down and feeling the soft air in her face. . . . Presently Millie Matoon caught sight of her and waved from the crowd beckoning. She shook her head. The others looked up and waved their hands. The air seemed filled with waving hands and laughter and calls. She waved to them gaily. A group of young men strolled by and the girls turned careless eyes. They were not waving to them. A young man made a snatch and seized a ribbon and held it up, shaking it teasingly. The girl snatched back striking with little dancing pats like a kitten. The young man laughed and strolled on. Isabel smiled down contentedly, watching them. John Sampson always teased. . . . Two other boys came up and talked a minute and went on. The girls shifted and laughed and talked. The warm sun played over them. A group of younger boys marked out a marble ring and began to play.

There was a rest-room inside at the north end of the building where the girls could take their luncheon, with a small stove for warming coffee or chocolate. And there was a similar room for men and boys at the west end. The rooms were rarely used. . . . They had been fitted up by John Junior when he came back from abroad. He had visited paternal factories there—Lord Leverhulme's and John Cad-

bury's, and he came home with dreams of commercial benevolence. . . . John Senior had granted the rooms surlily. He would have arranged to bring down the moon if John Junior insisted, and there would have been no more moonshine in the moon than in the rest-rooms—to him. When to his grim amusement the employees ignored the rest-rooms he chuckled. Then he stormed—at waste of good floor space. But the rooms remained vacant except on very stormy days when a subdued crowd gathered in them with punctilious formality. On other days the girls gathered as of old by the fence and the boys passed by and snatched at ribbons and made clumsy jokes at them.

Isabel never used the rest-room. When it rained she and Fannie ate their luncheon in the office in John Senior's absence. He smiled sardonically when he came back early one day and found them gathering up crumbs, but he made no comment.

John Junior looked at them disapprovingly. He too said nothing.

The rest-room was not the only difference of opinion between the senior and junior members of the firm. But when they drove from the office in the swift-rolling car they left differences and disagreements behind them.

To-day in the spring air the father sitting solidly on the soft cushions looked with affectionate eyes at the young man. For sheer pride and approval it would be difficult to match his enjoyment of his son's presence in the car beside him. Each morning he

waked with the fear of losing it, and each night he went to bed thankful.

He had long since given up hope of making John Junior a first-class business man though he had not confided this to John Junior. He would not for worlds have him know it. He planned craftily to make him feel that without his invigorating modern ideas the business would go to smash. Beyond this they did not talk much of business.

John Senior interested himself in poetry. He made slow headway in it from day to day. He had bought a book on poetry written by the maker of a famous explosive. It was a large book and it told exactly how poetry should be made— Poetry it seemed was a regular science, a kind of trade, and easy as silk-making when you got the hang of it. The explosive-maker explained how it was done and even rewrote several of the classics, showing how modern science would improve them.

John Senior studied the book faithfully. And reading the classics to be amended he gained a certain familiarity with them. They seemed to bridge a little the gap between John's world and his own. He had a guilty feeling of preferring the originals to the form presented by the explosive-man, but he concealed this preference carefully from John—who was modern in all things. It would not do to have him suspect that his father was old-fashioned in poetry as well as business. . . . He had therefore never learned that John despised the explosive-man and considered his amendments a kind of crude and ignorant sacrilege in the world of poetry.

"You done any poetry to-day?" asked the father casually. They were climbing the long hill to the house. The machine was in high and they moved smoothly and swiftly up the long slope.

John turned his gaze from the budding hedge at the right. The green privet shoots made him strangely content.

"Any poetry?— No— Yes— A little. Isabel copied some for me. A poem in blank verse." His father nodded.

"Same form as Hamlet?"

The young man smiled slightly. "Yes."

"I can't spare you Bel any more for a while," said the father thoughtfully. John Junior turned from the privet hedge. . . .

"You said——"

"Yes-yes! I know I promised—" He laid a placating hand on the knee near him. "You can have her again when the spring trade slacks up. . . . Maybe I could spare you Fannie now, once in a while, if you wanted her," craftily.

"I don't want Fannie!" It was almost sulky. "You can't dictate poetry to her!"

"No. I don't suppose I can—you can—anybody can!" said John Senior hastily. . . . "Why don't you take one of the machines? Do it yourself?" John stared.

"Copy—myself!"

"Um-m-."

The young man considered it.

"Well—all right," obligingly.

"Good idea!" said his father. A typewriter was

a long step toward the practical and he was a hopeful man. Moreover he was not sure he wanted Isabel copying any more of John's poetry. The look from the door and the quickly turned knob lingered with him. . . . It might not mean anything in particular and then again it might— Spring was in the air. . . . It would be a good thing anyway for John to have a machine of his own—safer for him to copy his own poetry maybe.

John Junior turned it over—"I need one just now—in the spring so. I want to send things to the *Atlantic*. It's important!"

His father accepted it at its face value. He said nothing.

"I have had one or two letters from the editors of the *Atlantic*," went on John Junior. "Personal letters—not just printed blanks!"

"They ever take anything of yours?"

"Not the *Atlantic*," admitted John. "I had an acceptance the other day." He added it carelessly. He had not told his father— It had seemed almost too sacred to mention. John Senior's face lighted.

"That so! You hadn't told me!"

"I hadn't—thought to speak of it."

"Pay you anything for it?" asked his father quickly.

"No— Poetry is not measured by price!" The tone was a little stiff.

"No-no! Of course not! Well that's good!" John Senior beamed on him and on the hedge. They were moving in through the wrought-iron

gate. The great house rose before them. John Berwick was ready to take what came and make the most of it—thankful that it was no worse. He turned to his poet-son with a cheerful smile.

“There’s an extra machine in my office—a good one. You take it up to your room. Do what you want with it.”

“Very well, sir.” The car came to a stop before the white-pillared porch. In an upper room of the house John Berwick had watched tragedy pass to fulfilment— He was thankful for what remained. Thankful for his son—even though he was not a business man but only a poet.

He laid an affectionate hand on John Junior’s arm and kept it there as they went up the wide white steps together.

VI

THE office door opened on a flurry and fluff. Fannie Blakeley blew in.

“Well! You can believe I’m glad to get here! Slow-coach!— Old man cross?” She took off her hat and passed to the closet.

Isabel smiled faintly. “No more than usual. He knew you were held up.” She nodded to the yellow envelope on the desk.

“Wasted a quarter!” grumbled Fannie. She searched for the mirror behind the dust-cloth and fluffed her hair and got out her vanity-box, humming a little.

“Glorious time!” she murmured. “They keep a car! Something like! Sometimes I think I won’t stay in this hole another day!” She whisked the cloth from her machine and blew lightly on it and felt for the rag at the back.

“What’s doing?” she asked briskly as she ran the cloth along the carriage. She tucked it behind the machine and looked over at Isabel.

“This,” said Isabel. She touched her note-book, “and that.” She nodded to the dictating machine beside her. Fannie’s face fell. She glared at the machine.

“That fool-thing! I *can’t*—not to-day—not after joy-riding all Sunday!” She looked at the machine belligerently.

“Well come here, old stick-in-the-box!” She seized it and whirled it before her to the window, connecting it to the plug in the baseboard.

Isabel’s eyes twinkled. She returned to her notes— There was silence—a little br-r-r—and then John Senior’s raucous voice from the machine—indignant and high. Fannie giggled.

“I just *can’t!*” she said helplessly. “Hear him, will you!” She gave a warning slap to the machine. She shut it off. “Swearing like a trooper,” she said contemptuously.

“He doesn’t mean anything!” said Isabel. “It’s just wind—and words!”

“It isn’t ladylike!” said Fannie. She giggled again and turned on the power and listened. “If I copied it that way he would never forgive me!”

Isabel came over and listened. Her little amused smile gathered up the words that rasped the air. She reached to the button and turned it off. “I’ll take it,” she said decisively—“if you can read my notes.”

“Your notes are always beauteous, dear!” replied Fannie. She received them with a sigh of relief and fluffed her elbows and settled into flying speed.

“Just turn that horn the other way, won’t you?” over her shoulder. “It makes me nervous—Even if I can’t hear it plain I know they’re something fierce.”

With a smile Isabel adjusted the machine, shifting the mouth-piece until it faced the door. She moved her typewriter a little to bring it in range again.

The office was quiet except for the subdued barking and grumbling in the horn. Isabel's pink ear turned to it, glowed a little. But after all there was nothing offensive in the words—just horse sense—rough sense. And if you took out the swear-words and touched it up a little it was nice breezy English. It went with the surf crashing off Craig's Point and the wind up on the moor. There was a salt tang to it that made you breathe deep.

Her keys clicked out the words and trimmed them and smoothed them down. She almost hated to do it—they were so like John Senior with their freshness and tang. Isabel knew guiltily that she preferred John Senior's business style to the flowing lines of John Junior's poems. It seemed to her sometimes that John Junior's poetry did not mean anything really. It was just words—and not in the least like John Junior. He could see a joke as well as any one, when he was not thinking up rhymes.

Suddenly she laughed out and turned back the machine. Fannie looked up. . . .

"Dippy?" she asked.

She turned her face. John Senior had come in. He looked at the machine and listened a minute and smiled grimly. He put out a hand and stopped it.

"Got all the rest done?" he asked.

"Yes."

He reached for the sheets and took them up. The telephone on his private wire sounded. He put down the papers and went over to the 'phone. "What?— Yes. . . . Oh!— Yes, I'll come. . . . Yes, right off."

His voice had become suddenly mild and pleased. He hung up the receiver with a look of shrewd satisfaction and straightened his vest on his plumpness and left the room.

Fannie's repressed giggle broke out as the door closed behind him. Her eye dropped to the street below and brightened. She leaned out.

"Limousine!" she said swiftly. "Some car, that!— And folks. Come over here, Bel." She waved a beckoning hand behind her.

But the girl shook her head smiling. "Not now! We have got to hurry you know!"

"All right! They're getting out. Visit-the-works folks!" she said in a high affected voice. "See-how-you-make-all-this-beautiful-silk! . . . And John Junior coming out— And John Senior bowing— My-my!" She returned to her machine with a mocking sigh.

The click of the typewriters went on. Isabel finished the rough draft of the notes and read them through. She reread one letter with a look of surprise—and read it again— Yes, she had it right apparently. That was what it meant. He had changed his mind then! She looked thoughtfully at the type-written page. She had not thought what the words meant as she copied them off. She had been more absorbed in getting them right and enjoying their briskness. Now she saw that John Senior had changed his mind. She had written four letters for him about this deal and John Senior had cautioned her that the letters must not be mentioned, no one must know—not even that he was interested in

it. It was not silk-mill business, but something about an option in oil. She guessed dimly that there was risk involved and a good deal of money for John Berwick if it went through.

He had been careful even about his notes he dictated from, tearing them in small pieces when he finished dictating and thrusting them back into his pocket, not a scrap had gone into the waste-basket— He could trust her, he told her, and she had glowed with pride. No one, not even Fannie, knew of the letters— It was fortunate she had taken the machine back from her! She read the letter again— John Senior had certainly changed his mind.

She went over it swiftly. . . . Was he worried? Was this why he growled and shouted so? She smiled faintly. He had not shouted much worse than usual!

Fannie glanced across at the silent machine and the girl looking thoughtfully down at the paper in her hand.

“Something wrong?” she asked carelessly.

“No.” Isabel put down the page with a flush. She turned to her machine. Then she seemed to change her mind and took up the paper with the carbon copy and carried them to the desk and placed them in a drawer, locking it and laying the key in a little dish on the desk. She understood now. . . . He had expected the roll to be copied before Fannie came back and he expected to sign it at once and send it off. He had meant to sign it a minute ago, when he came in. Well it was safe there. She glanced

down at the drawer and went back to her machine and put on a fresh sheet and reached to the horn.

Then a thought stayed her. She would run back the roll—repeat the letter she had just copied—make sure there was no mistake. She shifted the pointer to the left.

There was a sound of voices in the hall, formal and polite—company tones. Fannie lifted a swift face.

“Company!” she breathed, “and me in my second-best!”

“They won’t come in,” laughed Isabel. “Nothing to see in here!” She touched the button and the horn began with swift burring click, “John G. Moulton— Dear Sir——”

VII

SHE turned her head— The door to the hall was open. A tall man stood in it smiling.

John Berwick's face pressed close behind him. He was regarding the machine with intent look.

The voice in the horn was rolling stridently out, "With regard to the deal discussed at Dayton, I——"

With a grunt John Berwick moved toward it—but the stenographer's quick hand had touched a button and it was still. The tall man approached it.

"A dictating-machine!" he said pleasantly. "Very interesting. Do you like it?"

"No—I use it," said Berwick. The man laughed in appreciation of the difference.

"I've thought of getting one myself. Would you mind—?" He bent courteously to the young stenographer who sat with a little flush on her face waiting.

"Would you mind showing me how it works?" he asked.

"Certainly." She put out a hand.

Behind her John Berwick's eye glowed. But her hand did not touch the button. It merely turned a little catch at the side that released the roll. She withdrew the roll from its rod.

"I'll put in another one," she said quietly, "a better one than this." John Berwick's face wore a

gleam of humor. He watched her quick fingers select a roll from the stand beneath the machine and insert it deftly. The discarded roll lay on the table beside them.

The man took it up and turned it casually. He seemed to weigh it a little in his hand.

"Very light!" he said in surprise.

"Composition," said John briefly.

The man's fingers caressed the smooth shining surface lightly. "You would not think it could talk, would you!" he said softly.

"It can't—not now!" said John. There was a grim smile on his lips.

The stenographer touched the button and the horn gave out a little blare.

Isabel rose from her chair. "You can hear it better here," she said, "if you sit down."

The man accepted the chair with a bow. He bent his ear to the horn. It was rolling out a harmless account of stock and the crisp items dropped one by one into his listening ear. His face wore a smile. His fingers holding the discarded roll touched it absently as he listened to the voice.

"Very interesting!" he murmured. He glanced at John Berwick.

"Not your voice?" he said.

"No. Secretary of the Board," replied John. His face wore a satisfied look. But his eyes did not leave the roll in the capable fingers.

"Ah—very interesting—the difference in voices," said the man with a smile. "How do you stop it

now?" He glanced at Isabel and she came forward and touched it.

"You push it like this. . . . And you start it—like this." She repeated the process and the man repeated it after her, almost longingly it seemed.

"Very simple," he said. "And now—this?" He held up the roll. "How would you put it in?"

She took it from him with slow glance. She had not looked at John Berwick. But the owner stepped forward with a gruff smile.

"I'll do it." He took it from her. He turned to the machine and then somehow the roll slipped. . . . It struck the edge of the table and glanced with a crash. It lay in a hundred pieces on the floor. John Berwick looked down at it.

"Butter-fingers!" he said. The other man looked down—regretfully.

"Does a thing like that happen often?" he asked dryly.

"Not often," said John,—“not once in a dog's age! Clumsy of me!" He laughed awkwardly.

There were voices near the open door of the hall and the man turned.

A young woman stood in the doorway. John Junior was with her. She was looking up at him and smiling.

"See here, Ellen," said the man in a quick tone of affection. "Did you ever hear a machine talk?"

Her little courteous bow included the two young women as she came forward to the machine. She was tall and large-framed, and the reddish hair

gathered loosely about her face gave it a look of pallor. She bent to the machine with slow near-sighted gaze.

"How does it work?" she asked.

Her father touched it. "There she goes," he replied, and the crisp figures rolled up at her.

"How commercial!" she laughed listening. "Not Paderewski or vaudeville, is it!" She ran her hand along the bar.

"I'm thinking of getting one," said her father.

"Delightful!" she responded. "And I can talk into it. I should like to hear myself talk!" Her voice lingered on the words bell-like and low with a drawling note of pleasure.

"Try this one!" said John Berwick generously.

"May I?" She sat down before it with a little flutter of garments. All her clothes seemed oddly trivial on her. But her movements were free and large. She had the air of a woman who is accustomed to admiration and a little indifferent to it.

John Junior had not taken his eyes from her, and John Senior's glance under its gruffness wore a look of elation.

She folded her hands obediently in her lap and looked up at John Senior. "What next?" she asked. He turned to Isabel.

"Bring a roll," he commanded. "A fresh one in there." He nodded to the adjoining room.

She turned to obey him with a little smile in her eyes. She knew John Senior was secretly pleased with something, pleased to entertain these people

in his office perhaps, and show them things they had never seen before. But she was glad the roll had slipped. She wondered——

She hunted for a fresh roll but could not find one. They had all been used. Then a little smile of amusement touched her face as she looked at one she had picked up. She carried it to the machine.

“There are no fresh ones,” she said. “But here is one that is interesting——”

It was a roll of John Junior’s poems, the only one he had ever dictated. He had sternly refused to use the machine again after this one attempt.

“Cut it out!” he said harshly as the words rolled from the mouth-piece. But with a little gesture the young woman sitting in front of the machine stayed his hand.

The poem moved to the end and Isabel’s hand shut it off. The young woman turned to him with a generous smile, and her musical voice repeated the last words. . . .

“Charming!” she commented.

John Junior flushed brightly.

By her window Fannie, ostentatiously correcting copy, laughed out suddenly. John Junior glared at her and at the window, but Fannie seemed not to see. She had eyes only for her work—the model stenographer.

When the visitors were gone she yawned and leaned back and stretched a little. “Well I should faint!” she said dryly. “The nerve of you, putting that thing on! What did you do it for?”

"I don't know," said Isabel slowly. "I saw it and did it."

"I should think you did! . . . The old man was pleased though." She laughed.

"Was he?"

"Pleased as Punch! You could see him swell up with it." Isabel smiled.

"We have got to hurry now to make up for fooling!" said Fannie. She leaned forward and looked down from her window. She gazed with intent glance.

"Bowing and la-da-dahing!" she said mincingly, "and come-again-ing! Oh my! . . . And clothes! What do you suppose she paid for that coat?" she demanded, whirling around.

"Coat?— I don't know. She ought not to wear it whatever she paid," said Isabel with decision. Fannie stared.

"You being a socialist?" she inquired.

"No— It doesn't suit her."

"Doesn't suit you, you mean!— Too swell! Did you see John Junior look at her!"

Isabel flushed slowly. "You are being a cat, Fannie!"

"Cat-nothing!" retorted Fannie. "He couldn't take his eyes off—from the minute they came in—and all her flummery——"

"That's it!" said Isabel quickly. "She ought not to wear fluffy things. She ought to be plain and big." Her absorbed eyes seemed looking at it. "I should love to dress her," she said thoughtfully—

“long lines and colors and everything close and fine. She would be beautiful!” Fannie turned and stared slowly.

“You are nutty!— What do you care what she wears?”

The girl’s eyes came back from the dream of colors. “Oh I just seemed to see her in them—and different!”

“You better just seem to see your machine for a while,” said Fannie dryly, “and different.”

There was silence and the clicking keys.

“She’s got the money to spend, all right.” Fannie drew out a sheet and flicked it aside and put in another. “Can’t say I care much for the old cock though!”

“For—?” Isabel looked up.

“For his Nibs—spats and patent-leather. Soft on top and hard as nails down under! You know who he is don’t you? Eben Braithwaite— Awful swells, you know. Rich!— He’s president of the bank or something over to Camden. Ran for Governor once. I heard him make a speech in the opera-house there. Punk! They didn’t nominate him . . . he just ran— Guess he could do *that* all right!” She laughed out and attacked her machine with a flourish.

“There—that’s the last! I’m through!” She whisked on the cover and got up.

“John Senior’s coming! His step!” She opened the closet door and took down her hat and arranged the dust-cloth for a skilful look.

John Berwick crossed to his desk and drew forward the papers waiting on it for his signature.

"You through!" He glanced sharply at Fannie's hat and at the clock.

It was five minutes past five.

"Good-night," said Fannie. She closed the door. It had almost the effect of flight.

VIII

JOHN BERWICK signed his letters slowly, reading as he signed. He finished them and glanced at the broken roll on the floor. The shattered bits had been swept one side out of the way.

"Too bad you didn't get a chance to copy the Moulton letter." Isabel looked up absently from her study of John's blank-verse.

"I copied it. Yes— It's there in your desk—in the drawer. The key is in that little tray on top."

He unlocked the drawer and drew out the sheets and glanced at them.

"Good girl!" he said. He read the letter slowly. He seemed considering it. He looked across to her.

"See here! I think I'll dictate this again. Bring your book!"

He had changed his mind back again, it seemed. She came over with her pad.

He dictated slowly and waited a minute considering.

"That's all, I guess. Copy it in the morning and have it ready to sign when I come."

She nodded. She was looking down at it, reading her notes with a look of quick interest. He watched her. He was twirling his watch-chain absently.

"I have changed my mind, you see! But I've got a hunch that the man who was here this afternoon, Braithwaite— He ran for Governor once—" John

Berwick's chest expanded subtly. "I've got an idea Braithwaite's interested in it.

"He keeps an eye on me all right! Whenever I get on to anything worth while I notice Braithwaite's after it pretty quick. Guess he makes most of his money that way!" He expanded with a quick puff.

"He is welcome to all he can make out of me!" he chuckled.

Isabel was making marks on the edge of her pad, listening. She was happy that John Senior trusted her. She knew there was no one else in the works he would have talked to in this way. But there was a little shadow in the look on her face.

"I don't like him very well," she said. She went on making marks. John Senior laughed shortly.

"You don't have to like Braithwaite! You just watch him!"

"Will he be in this too?" She touched the notes.

"Not if *I* am!" said John Berwick decisively. "There won't be any 'too' about it! I'm not in it to be gobbled up! You take good care of that!" He nodded to her note-book. He drew down the cover of his desk and locked it.

"I always do take good care," said Isabel.

"I know. You are a good girl!" He sat looking at her thoughtfully, twirling the watch-chain.

"I am trusting you with things—a good deal—for a young girl," he said slowly. "But I have an idea you are going to be worth it. You can make a good woman of business if you keep on the way

you've begun— Think about being a help to me— don't get to having notions about beaux." He spoke curtly. Her face flushed a clear bright color.

"I'm not thinking about anything—except my work!" she said. She was looking down.

He watched her kindly. She glanced up with a look of humor that twinkled at him.

"But it isn't just because I want to help you. I am interested in things too. I like to see how they are going to turn out."

"Good!" He slapped his knee sharply. "I said you would make a good woman of business! I wouldn't swap you for any man I've got in the works!" He got up.

"If I'm late about getting down in the morning tell Fannie to bring the file up to date. We can't be running behind forever." He nodded to her curtly and closed the door.

The girl returned to her machine. She would copy John's poetry and then go home.

The room was filled with faint purplish light. The spring twilight outside crept in and the blank white walls reflected it softly. In the field across the road a robin called from the top of a bare tree.

Isabel could see the robin from her machine, and she could see the twigs against the faint purple haze beyond. She liked the office after every one had gone home. It was a different place. The vacant chairs and Fannie's covered machine and the bare white walls seemed to gather up silence and free the happiness in her. She yielded to it un-

consciously. Sometimes she sang a little, and then there was a curious echo in the room as if the walls and chairs and desk took it and went singing with her.

She copied a few lines, humming to herself. The verses took shape and she stopped to read them over. There was something in them she had not noticed when she took them down. The lines ran a little way smoothly, then they halted and broke off or went limping along. . . .

John Junior's poetry was like that, she thought swiftly with a smile as the words shaped under her fingers—a little like John Junior.

She had never noticed it before, but it seemed to sing even when it limped. She repeated the words to herself, half-crooning them.

The door opened. She looked up annoyed. It was John Junior. He was smiling.

“Father gone?” he asked.

“Yes.” She said it crossly. Now he would be silly and think she was admiring his poetry. She almost despised it anyway. Only it amused her to see that it was like John Junior. He came over to the machine.

“You copying my poem!” he said happily.

“Yes.” She drew out the sheet and laid it down. He looked at it affectionately.

“I will take it along,” he said.

“It isn't finished.”

“Why——!”

“I haven't corrected it— There's ‘bug’ for ‘but.’” She pointed to it severely. “You don't

want it like that!— And there's another page besides—two more, I should think." She scanned her notes impersonally. He withdrew stiffly.

"Oh, very well." She listened to his retreating steps going down the hall. She gave a sigh of relief.

The room gathered about her again. The white walls became friendly and the chairs and tables relaxed to her subtly. She smiled and inserted a fresh sheet, humming to herself. Then she drew it out— She would use Fannie's machine. The light was growing dim.

Over by the window she worked swiftly. She finished the poem and corrected the last sheet and gathered it up. The robin was calling from the bare tree and she looked across to him. Below, a car came swiftly in sight down the street. She glanced at it and looked away and looked again. It had stopped below and a man was getting out. He wore patent-leather shoes and spats.

Why should he come back?—John Junior? she wondered. She looked down again swiftly at the car. No, his daughter was not with him. She gave a little puzzled frown. . . . The door downstairs was locked of course. He could not get in. . . . Her thought ran ahead of him—shutting him out.

There was a quick step in the corridor. She got up. He opened the door quickly. He drew back.

"I beg your pardon! I did not think any one was here! . . . I came for my daughter's scarf. He looked about him vaguely. "She dropped it somewhere," he murmured. "So I came for it."

"Yes?" The girl had not stirred. He looked at her. There was a little admiration in the glance. Behind her the purple window showed duskily.

She moved to the desk and took up the telephone——

"I will ask Miss Blakeley if she saw it," she said quietly.

"Oh, don't trouble!" He went a step toward her.

But she had called up. Her ear listened— "This is Miss Merton speaking. Berwick's Mill— Yes—in the office. Is Miss Blakeley there? Thank you." She hung up the receiver. Her hand remained on it lightly.

"I will ask her in the morning."

"I dislike to trouble you," he protested. The admiration in his eye deepened. . . . Berwick had a very competent secretary—as well as a pretty girl. He wondered what he paid her. His eye dropped to the locked desk.

"Well, I thank you. You are working very late!" He turned away. He paused.

"If you are going home I shall be pleased to take you. My car can drop you anywhere you like." It was the courteous man of the world who waited her answer. . . . He was not eager—only very polite and kind, almost fatherly. She shook her head.

"Thank you. I am not ready to go yet."

He withdrew and she heard his footsteps down the corridor. They echoed a little in the empty hall.

The door slammed. The car rolled smoothly away.

She moved to the window and looked out. She watched it speeding out of sight.

What did he want in the office with the robin singing over there in the sky— What had he hoped to find? His daughter's scarf of course——

She gathered up her letters for the mail.

IX

THE light outside seemed less dim as she stepped from the mill. Every object was bathed in clear liquid freshness—like the robin's note that called and was silent and called again. . . . It seized her senses as she looked about her slowly—the dirty mill, the fence across the way, the mud-tracked road, and the bare waiting trees. There was a still beauty on them—a sense of something about to be revealed that made her strangely happy—It made her heart ache a little.

She walked slowly toward the town. The streets were deserted. From a ball-ground across the lots she could hear the boys' voices calling shrilly. . . . Supper must be over. She hurried a little.

She turned the corner and came suddenly on a group of children gathered about a lamp-post. A mail-box was on the post, and she dropped in the letters she had copied for John Berwick and looked down at the group gathered beneath the lamp. They were regarding a child who stood with her back to the wall facing them with indignant half-tearful eyes.

Isabel glanced at her. She stood with defiant feet, short and straight, her head held high and the tears dangerously near. The group tittered.

“Oh, my! And no shoes!”— “Sh-h-! Maybe she's poor!”— “She's got a ring!” The child slipped her hand quickly behind her back and re-

garded them helplessly. "I suppose she thinks it's fine to wear a ring—and no shoes!" The group tittered again and the child seemed to crouch over her bare legs——

"What is the matter?" said Isabel sharply.

The group started—as if to dissolve. Then it stood its ground.

"Who is she, Marty?" asked Isabel of the girl at her elbow. She was a Swede and she lived next door to Isabel.

"I don't know," said Marty. She affected vast indifference. "She's a new girl," she said patronizingly. "We don't any of us know her— *Do we?*" She turned to the group.

"No. *We* don't know her. And she won't speak—nor *anything!* We haven't done anything to her." It was righteous and glib. Isabel turned to the child.

"Who are you, dear?"

"I'm—I'm Jenny," she said. She stopped suddenly with a little gulp and her lips closed firmly on the word. The group cast a look at Isabel—There, you see!

Isabel smiled impatiently. She crossed to the child and knelt by her.

"No one is going to hurt you, Jenny. Come, I will take you home!" She held out her hand and the child seized it. She cast a tearful look of reserve at the watching group.

"They won't hurt you," said Isabel, with a smile. "They didn't mean anything!"

"No, we didn't mean a *thing!*" echoed Marty, indignant.

"But you weren't very nice to her," said Isabel. She turned away, the child's hand held tight in hers.

Marty Paulsen made a swift important movement beside them. She seized the ungainly flat hat from her head and clapped it on the child's curls with commanding gesture.

"You can wear my hat!" she said.

Isabel stopped. The other children came up. "Do you want to wear it?" said Isabel.

The child obscured under the wide flatness blinked gravely. Marty bent down and peered at her with friendly smile. "You are all right!" she said protectingly.

She had drawn a soiled handkerchief from her pocket and was wiping the moist eyes and adjusting the hat with solicitous touch. "It looks nice on you!"

The child smiled a watery smile and the crowd held its tittering breath and looked on in soft amazement. Isabel laughed a little.

"Do you want her to play with you?" She turned to the group.

"Of course we want her! We just asked her name—and she wouldn't open her mouth. She wasn't polite!"

"No, she wasn't polite!" They echoed it together, looking reproachfully at the stranger. Isabel bent to her.

"Do you want to play with them?" she asked.

The child nodded. The face under the flopping hat was important and grave.

"If they don't laugh at my legs," she said with a gulp. "My mother wants me to go barefoot. She says it makes me strong!" The children were circling close now.

"We won't laugh at your legs!"

"No— And you can wear Marty's hat! Come on!"

Isabel smiled down on the grotesque hat. A little lump came in her throat. She was thinking of a child in a rain-coat, and suddenly she took the hat from her own head and was pulling off a large crimson rose.

"See! I will trim it for you!"

Marty turned with important smile. "Anybody got a pin?" she asked.

"I got one!"— "Here's one!" They reached eager pins and pressed forward.

Isabel knelt by the child and fastened the flower in place. The child held her head stiff and high. Her tears were dry. A smile trembled on her mouth.

Isabel patted the flower.

"There!" She stood off and looked at it. The awed group gazed. Isabel nodded assuringly.

"It looks very well. Run along now!"

"Will Marty keep it when she takes her hat back?"

"Yes, Marty will have it. But you must take Jenny home first."

"Oh, we'll take her. Come on, Jenny! *You* can play with us."

They took hold of hands—a child on either side. Their eyes were on the hat admiringly. But they rested too on the child's eyes still wet with tears. "Come on, Jenny!" they said. "Come on, Jenny!" They ran happily down the street, the hat bobbing among them.

Isabel watched them out of sight. The light glimmered faintly on her hair. She held her hat in her hand turning it and looking at it with elusive smile. She replaced it, still smiling, the lump in her throat. The high childish voices seemed drifting back from the day when the little rain-coat came and wrapped her about and comforted her.

She walked on quickly. Her mind was alert. She seemed to have wakened from a dream. She felt as if she had not been alive before. . . . She had never had a chance to be alive! Except for the little raincoat there had been nothing that was not practical and sordid and sensible in her life.

Perhaps the child and the battered hat had roused her—or Ellen Braithwaite with her money and ill-fitting clothes had touched some spring of imagination—or John Junior's poetry had got into some cranny of her brain and waked it—perhaps the courteous gray-haired man looking at her with admiring eyes had touched a hidden weakness. Or was it the spring and the robin singing in the bare high tree. . . . There were other things in life than bobbins and spindles and typewritten pages and John Senior and his business woman.

She made a little face at the business woman

and sped along the street. Then she stopped—in dismay. Was she going to cry? . . . Never! She was only going to be a girl—like other girls—girls all over the world. They wore pretty clothes and laughed and danced in the springtime. Her feet went tripping in gay little steps and her heart tripped with them in lightness.

X

SHE opened the door into the shabby room—The same dish-towels on the line behind the stove, and the same apron on the same nail beside it. But the room seemed trying to look different to-night as she stood in the doorway regarding it. She wondered what it was. It seemed suddenly meaner and smaller, but there was a hidden meaning behind the shabby comfort.

She passed quickly through into the sitting-room. Her mother was darning a table-cloth. And beside her, his elbow spread on the table and his fingers over his ears, a boy was studying from a wide flat book. He was muttering words in a monotonous, meaningless tone. He peered up from between his fingers at her.

“You’re late, Sis!” he said practically.

Her mother looked up. There was a little querulous anxious line between her eyes.

“Where have you been so late?” she asked.

“Just working,” said Isabel. “Did you save supper for me?”

“Yes. It’s in the oven.” She put down her work.

“Don’t come! I’ll get it!” But her mother followed her to the kitchen and opened the oven door. A savory smell swept out and filled the room.

The girl sniffed it. “Doesn’t it smell good!” she

said happily. The mother placed it on the table and her face puckered in a close reluctant smile.

"It isn't anything—not much—just potato and onion and a taste of macaroni and tomato in it. . . . But your father said it tasted good."

"My!— But I'm hungry!" The girl threw her hat on the chair near by.

Her mother brought her work from the next room, drawing the lamp to the edge of the table and turning it up a little. Isabel ate in silence. Her mother looked over to her.

"What made you so late, Bel?"

"I did some copying—after hours." The woman held up her needle and threaded it against the light.

"Seems to me they work you pretty hard lately." She was squinting at the needle and drawing the thread through into place. "This is the third time this month, isn't it?"

"I like to work," said the girl. "I don't mind." She was looking at her mother's shabby clean dress and the little parting in her gray hair. The hair was thin and the grayness was turning a dull white. The hands knotting the thread were rough. The knuckles shone faintly red.

Isabel's eyes dwelt on the rough worn hands as they hovered above the patch. "Nobody minds working!" she said swiftly. "It's being poor that hurts—being poor and ugly and never having things!" She threw out her hands. Her mother leaned forward, peering at her past the lamp.

"I guess you are tired out!" she said.

"I'm not the least bit tired!" said Isabel. "I feel like dancing and singing . . . and new clothes!"

Her mother sank back with a quick little sigh. She picked up her work and sewed a few stitches. "Coal is twelve-fifty a ton," she said after a pause, "and they say it's going higher."

"I must earn more money," said the girl thoughtfully.

"I don't want you to work any harder!" Her mother's voice was quick. "It isn't right! We can get along somehow."

"I can't!" said the girl softly. "I don't wonder girls go wrong," she added quietly.

Her mother leaned forward in quick dismay——

"Isabel!" she said reprovingly.

The girl nodded. "We *need* pretty things—just as much as flowers need color and sweet smells and pretty shapes." . . . She seemed to be thinking of it— "They must have got them somehow!" she said slowly.

"God made them that way," said the older woman piously. She was sewing fast now.

"Well He made me that way too! He didn't mean I should go around looking like a last year's rag-bag, did He!" Her eye fell on the shabby hat and she reached to it and held it at arm's length——

"Look at that!"

"It doesn't look very stylish," admitted her mother. Then her gaze quickened.

"Why, where is your rose?"

"I gave it away," said Isabel.

"Gave—?" faltered her mother. Her hands dropped to her lap. Isabel nodded.

"I found somebody that needed it—more than I did. So I gave it to her. . . . I don't think myself it looks much worse than it did before—" She held it off and turned it and surveyed it.

"Maybe it don't," said her mother doubtfully. "But the rose looked as if you had *tried* to be decent."

"That's just it!" Isabel laughed out. "—as if I had tried— Well, next time I am going to try and I'm going to succeed too!" She got up. She stood very still and straight gazing about the room. A little smile was on her lip.

Her mother looked up at her perplexed.

"I don't know what's got into you, Bel!" she said soothingly.

"I'm different—and I'm going to *look* different!"

The mother's gaze had a little pride in it. She looked at her work and fingered it awkwardly.

"I have never said anything, Bel. I don't want to make you conceited—and we hadn't ought to think too much about looks—" She hurried on as if afraid of herself and her words. "But you always look nice. There isn't any girl in Hanover that's better looking than you are!"

The girl laughed out happily. "But I don't look stylish—do I, mother!"

"No—not stylish exactly. There isn't much style in Hanover, I guess."

"I shouldn't think there was! Why, in the movies

and the magazines no girl would wear a dress like this!" She held it out on either side, spreading the wide skirt and dancing a step or two. "They always wear something pretty—and different in the movies—Make you wonder what's coming next! And when the war began they had military things, snug and smart, and you felt as if you had to put your hands in your pockets and march— 'One-two, One-two!' little short steps, you know, on parade." She marched across the room keeping time to her words, and her mother's eyes followed her wondering.

"I don't know where you ever got such notions," she murmured.

"I didn't get them. They were born in me. You gave 'em to me!" She stood by the table looking down and smiling. The mother shook her head.

"I never gave you any such notions. In my time we had Sunday clothes—the things we wore just Sundays," she explained as if from another world.

"I know— The way you are always trying to have me do! No use— They'd be out of style before you'd done a month of Sundays with them!" She laughed quietly.

"I want some new clothes such as movie girls wear. . . . I don't want to see 'em just in movies any longer and know other girls have them. I want some myself!" There was a flush in her cheeks and her voice had a quick eager note.

"I'm sick of the movies!" she said swiftly. "I don't want to go there and sit like a bump on a log looking at them! I want to *be* a movie—on the move

myself! I feel little dances in my feet and little tunes in my head!"

Her voice had reached to the boy in the next room. He was in the doorway, his hands in his pockets, looking at her admiringly——

"You've got a whole set of chimes in your head, Sissie—regl'r belfry!" he laughed. "No bats in it, though!" He brought his geography to the table and sat down with another admiring glance at the girl and a hesitating one at his mother.

But the mother paid no attention. Her puzzled gaze was on the shining girl. She had moved to the table and leaned over the boy, a hand on his shoulder.

"What are you studying, Jim?"

"Joggerfy. We've got Paris to-morrow. Names—something fierce. Look at that!"

"I see!" She bent nearer. "Paris is wonderful!" she said under her breath, leaning on his shoulder. He looked up.

"Now what d'you know about that!" he retorted. There was a grin on his round face.

"In the movies—don't you remember, Jim—when I took you? Pretty dresses— Even in the war they wore them. . . ."

"You mean that flying-machine film?" he demanded, "and the tanks?"

"Yes-s," she admitted.

"I didn't notice their clothes," scornfully. "They might 'a' had nothing on—for all me!"

"James!" said his mother. He grinned.

The girl's eyes had a quick light in them. "They

seem to grow pretty things," she said, "the way the flowers do, and they look as if they belonged—not just put on. French women are so beautiful!" She said it wistfully. Her mother's disapproving gaze turned to the map.

"Better be good than stylish!" she said coldly.

"Why can't you be good—and stylish too?" The girl turned a little quick look at her, sitting dully beside the lamp.

"They never are!" said her mother.

"Well— I'm going to be!" She said it defiantly—a declaration of war, or faith. Then the color leaped up again in her face.

"Bully for you, Sis!" The boy was making marks on the side of his map. He looked up at her shyly. The mother reached a hand to his pencil and stopped it.

"You go right off to bed, Jim." He obeyed reluctantly, closing his book with a little slam and stopping at the faucet for a drink of water. It took him a long time, gazing over the rim of the cup as he drank.

"Run along!" said his mother.

"G'night!" he responded, and the door slammed behind his scurrying heels.

The room was still.

XI

THE girl went into the sitting-room and the mother sat alone gazing before her. Now and then she sighed—hardly more than a breath repressed. After a minute she took the lamp and opened the door at the foot of the stairs and went up.

The girl coming back to the kitchen found it dark. She stood looking about the dim room with the chinks of light from the stove, and again the feeling of homely comfort stole over her. She brought the light from the other room, she would wash the dishes she had used.

The door from the stairs opened. Her mother stood in it, the light of the lamp shining up on her dull face and falling on a pile of loose silky stuff she carried on her arm. It trailed down her skirt and she gathered it up as she set the light on the table.

The girl was looking at it wonderingly.

“It’s my wedding dress,” said her mother, smoothing it. I have had it put away a good while. The breadths are good. She held one up to the light. It glowed softly through the sheer transparent texture of the silk.

“You see—not a break or tear in it anywhere!” She spread it out lovingly.

The girl’s eyes regarded it gravely.

“I didn’t know you had such a pretty wedding dress!”

"I've had it put away a good many years. I want you should take it and make it up." The girl sat down. She shook her head.

"You're awfully good, mother—but it isn't what I want. . . . I want *bright* things—something with a lilt and style to it!" She was fingering the silk.

"A lilt—!" said her mother vaguely. Her eyes stared, perplexed.

Isabel laughed and nodded. "Something that has color—life! This is so dull and sweet, mother—like you!" She stroked it softly.

The woman's face flushed. She looked down at the silk. "We could dye it?" she said questioningly. "You wouldn't mind having it dyed—if it was a pretty color, would you?" She was groping, reaching with invisible hands from the past to her child.

The girl's face lighted swiftly. "That's a great idea! Could you?" There was quiet pride in her mother's face.

"I can do it so'st you'd never know the difference—with these new dyes. And it doesn't hurt the goods either—not a mite. I wouldn't want to spoil the silk. You see how soft it is and heavy—and how nice it falls!"

"It's lovely!" said the girl. "I didn't suppose you had anything like it, ever!" The mother's pride deepened. She took a little parcel from the curve in her arm.

"And this was my scarf I wore—" She lifted a

corner of the delicate stuff and it floated free. The girl caught it in both hands.

"Why, it is beautiful!" she said. "And in a different color—it would be—" She broke off, seeming to see its brightness before her.

"I had a little bonnet with a wreath that went with 'em," said the mother wistfully. "But that's gone long ago!" The girl came from her dream and laughed.

"I couldn't wear your bonnet, mother. But I can make something lovely of these"— She smoothed them a little. "Only you wouldn't want the scarf dyed, would you?"

"I don't care what you do with it. It isn't any use to me—only to bury me in," she added.

"Mother!" the girl chided.

"Yes— I know. . . . I hadn't ought to say that! Only seeing them brought things back to me—and how happy I thought I was going to be." She stared at them a minute.

The girl was silent. It had not occurred to her before that her mother was ever young. . . . Her thought followed it.

"How old were you, mother—when you and father were married?"

"I was nineteen—going on twenty," said her mother. "Twenty that fall, and we were married in July."

"I wonder how you ever got acquainted?" said the girl musingly. Her fingers were touching the silk softly.

"Got acquainted—?" The mother's face was

puzzled. "Why, we always knew each other. His family lived the other side of the town, but we went to school together."

"He didn't propose to you in school, did he!"

Her mother laughed out and her face woke to the glow of remembrance.

"No, there wasn't any foolishness then. But when we got older he walked home from prayer-meeting with me 'most every week. And then we used to have church socials once in a while." She mused on it.

"Church sociables," murmured the girl. "We don't have anything like that now."

"No—they're kind of gone by, I guess. . . . You have the movies." She said it without irony. Church sociables and movies were natural phenomena. Human beings did not make them or criticise. They accepted them with the rain and snow and the sun and growing things in the world.

"I remember we had a church picnic once, too," she went on. She sighed a breath.

"Your father was a good deal different then," she added quietly.

A step sounded outside the door. She half-crouched to the silk as if to protect it. Then she stood up.

The man who opened the door was thick-set, with a dull face and heavy hands and feet. He hung his cap on a nail by the door and came over to the table. He looked curiously at the silk and at the scarf in Isabel's hands.

"Been buying finery, have you?" he grunted. His tone was gruff.

"It's my wedding dress," said the wife quickly.

"Oh!" He regarded them without interest.

"Mother has given them to me," said Isabel. "I'm going to have it made up."

He touched the silk with his finger—as if it were miles away. "Think you'll catch a beau, I suppose!" He laughed lightly. She flushed.

"I don't want a beau—" she flashed out. "I want to be like other girls!"

He stared at her. "Well, ain't you—like other girls? I don't see but what you look about like the rest of 'em." He turned away.

"I don't care what you do—if it don't cost money. I can tell you there is no money in the drug-business to buy flum-a-diddles!" He went toward the sitting-room.

"There isn't any lamp in there," said the wife.

"I don't want a light," he replied glumly. The woman gathered up the silk. She motioned to Isabel with her lips.

"You take the light in," she said. The girl took up the lamp and carried it to the next room. He was groping in a closet for his slippers. He found them and shuffled across to the table. He looked gruffly at the girl's shining face.

"I'm not going to ask you for money!" she said crisply. "It isn't likely—when I pay board to mother and give her all I earn beside!" She faced him, a little indignant.

"Well-well! I didn't mean anything. I've just

been going over things before I came home, and I can tell you things look pretty blue." He sighed and took up a paper indifferently.

She stood with both hands on the table gazing at him.

"Why don't you sell out?" she asked.

"Sell out!—" He looked at her sharply over the paper. "How would I make a living I if sold out?" She did not remind him that there was never any profit from the store. She was making straight for a point.

"You could work in the mill. They're short of hands and they're paying five dollars now— Some of them get five."

"I've never done that sort of work," he said shortly.

"It's easy, they say."

"I don't want any man boss over me!"

"I should think you would rather work for a boss than be in debt all the time!" she ventured.

"Well, I wouldn't!" He shook the paper decisively.

"And have mother have to save and pinch so——"

He glared at her. "You don't know what you're talking about!" he said gruffly. "You get your flum-a-diddles if you want to—if you've got money to burn— Only don't ask me for it!"

He breathed heavily.

She turned away.

She heard him muttering a little as she went from the room.

XII

THE main street of Hanover had two churches, Baptist and Congregational, a fire-engine house and three stores. Over one of the stores was a movie-hall. Town-meetings were held in the upper room of the school-house on a side street. The offices of the two doctors and a dentist were in their own homes. There was no lawyer in Hanover. All legal business as well as banking went to Camden. Forty years ago Hanover was a prosperous community—a centre in itself. But farming declined. The farms about Hanover were sold or rented to foreigners, Greeks and “Polanders.” The young men went to the city or they went West and bought ranches and larger farms. Business shifted to Camden, where several factories sprang up. The native population of Hanover moved nearer the centre. They had no connection with the foreign element. They lived on each other in precarious fashion or drew their small sums of interest from Camden banks. If no one was rich no one was poor. They heard vaguely of poverty in congested centres. But in Hanover every one was “comfortably off.”

The social life of the town centred in the church. The girls as they grew up learned to cook and sew. They married early and if they were not content no one knew of it. Neighbors “ran in,” to borrow or to gossip. But no one discussed her own affairs out-

side the family. There was a polite assumption that all respectable people were happy. If they were not happy there was nothing to be done about it. The faces that gathered in church each Sunday grew a little more dull and inactive and purposeless. They were traced with meaningless lines.

Then one day John Berwick returned to the town where he had lived as a boy. He brought back his money to Hanover. He built a factory just outside the centre, and built a beautiful house on the hill overlooking the town. He furnished it with grand furniture and brought his wife and two children to live in it.

The house on the hill made little difference in the town. From the first the wife had seemed out of place in Hanover. She had been brought up in different circumstances and they regarded her as different. It was reported that she read aloud to the boy, poetry for the most part, and there was a grand piano.

The dignified graceful figure and the two children beside it driving through the town became an accustomed sight. She was cordial to those she met on the street or in church, but she seemed to have nothing in common with them and gradually she was left to herself. Her coming made no change in the life of Hanover.

It was the factory John Berwick built just outside the centre of the town that brought the change. It offered employment to the town and the town accepted it—as uncritically as it accepted all events

that touched it from the outside. Within five years the centre of the life of Hanover shifted to the silk mill. Every family had at least one member working in it, and in some cases whole families were on the pay-roll. . . . The church was regarded a little patronizingly now. Families slept late on Sunday morning. Many of them no longer went to the morning service. The evening service had been given up. The prayer-meeting was attended by a handful of older people, most of them women who had a lifelong Thursday-evening habit and would have been lost without it.

The young people went to the movies or strolled slowly up the street, or they sat on the steps and talked and leaned over the fence a little while and then went to bed.

Even the war did not stir the quiet droning existence of the town. A few of the younger men were drafted and went away. There was sporadic knitting of sweaters and socks— Pictures of battles passed before them on the screen, but it was all too far away to touch Hanover—and Hanover was too steeped in slumber to be roused by the noise of cannon.

They spent their money for the movies and for candy, but for little else except food and simple clothes. There was no rivalry in the clothes or in the house furnishings. Every one knew what every one else earned and just how much money his father had left him. There was no use trying to impress people who knew all about you already. Much of the

money on the Berwick pay-roll went into the banks at Camden.

The stores did a spasmodic business in the spring and fall, but most of the trade went to Camden or to mail-order houses.

The drug-store, the one place where competition with Camden might have held its own, was the poorest in town. The stock was dusty and shopworn. Since there was no certainty of finding what one wanted, the doctors renewed an old custom of filling prescriptions instead of sending them to Merton's store.

This arrangement suited both patient and doctor, and if Aaron Merton resented it no one knew or cared. He seemed to belong to the past—like the drugs on his shelves.

His family ceased to look to the store for income. They regarded it for the most part as a place where Aaron went in the morning and returned from at night. There was a back-room where he sat most of the time with a few old cronies, emerging only when the bell from the door jangled. Isabel was ashamed of the back-room. Her father was never intoxicated, but he was often surly and always wrapped in a daze or half-stupor that seemed to her acute senses maudlin.

The family lived on the ten dollars a week she earned in the office, eked out sometimes by a cut of meat her father brought home, when he was hungry, or by something from the stock on the shelves in the store. She did not resent this use of her money

for the family support. She accepted it as uncritically as Hanover accepted the silk mill and John Berwick's domination of the town. She did not resent her father's incompetency—only for the faint feeling of shame she associated with the back-room and the men gathered there. She had a dim memory of her father when he was different and when things at home were different.

She came down to breakfast the next morning after his rebuff of her plans, with a vague feeling of relief that he was not there. She wanted to talk with her mother about the dress.

She had fallen asleep with happy visions of it floating before her, and it had played in and out through her dreams.

The kitchen was empty when she came in, but there was a fire in the stove and the coffee-pot was standing on the back. She poured herself a cup and sat down.

The sun was just coming up, and the shrubs and trees in the yard had a fresh misty look in the growing light.

A figure hurried along by the fence as she looked out. . . . It was her mother hurrying with her shoulders a little shrugged up and something in her hand.

She came in quickly out of the freshness, breathing a little fast.

“I ran over to Mis' Stillman's to borrow her color card.” She took the card from beneath her cape and the girl's eyes lighted up. Her mother handed it to her——

"Here, you take it while I dish things up for you. I warmed up the potato and a little of that cold fish we had." She threw off the cape and bustled about the stove. Her face was almost alert as she took up the food and brought it to the table.

"There was a kind of blue there, I sort of liked—?" She leaned over.

"This one?"

The two heads bent to the card. The mother's finger ran along the bright blocks——

"No—that one higher up. I thought it would be nice for the scarf."

The girl held it off and looked at it with half-closed eyes. "I believe it would!" she said softly. "It's nice!— Will it really look like that?" She regarded it doubtfully.

"Oh, yes—these new dyes! Mis' Stillman dyed a dress for Gerty—one of her old ones—and she put a piece of the goods on the card to show me. You couldn't 'a' told the difference hardly—only of course the card's shiny."

"It's lovely!" said the girl. "How soon can you do it?"

"Right off. I'm going to send over to Camden for the dyes to-day."

"Father doesn't keep them, I suppose?"

"No— He don't like to bother," he says. She breathed a half sigh.

The girl got up and reached for her hat. "Has he gone to the store?"

Her mother glanced quickly at the clock.

"No, he's sleeping over. I'll have to call him, I guess——"

The girl turned her hat on her hand, looking at it with a slow smile. "I'll just have to get another, won't I!" She placed it on her head and her mother regarded it with disapproving gaze.

"It's awful without any flowers! Here, let me take it!" She seized it in quick fingers and searched in a drawer of pieces and drew out a band of velvet. Her fingers trembled a little as she pulled off the tumbled silk and wound the velvet about the crown and knotted it at the side.

"There! That's better anyway!" She held it off.

"You're certainly clever, mother! I never knew you could do anything like that." She placed it on her head and her mother gazed at it intently.

"It's better anyway!" She said with satisfaction.

"I should think so!" laughed Isabel. "But I'm going to have a new one, you know!" And she stepped out into the sunshine with it in her heart. She was going to have pretty clothes and be like other girls!

She did not question it or wonder. . . . The world all about her was fresh with life. The sap was creeping up from the ground filling the trees, and buds and blossoms in their folded cups in the dark were groping vaguely toward the light.

XIII

THERE was no one in the office when she came in, and she opened her note-book and began to copy swiftly. She would have it ready for John Senior when he came.

Only a line or two remained to be written.

The machine gave a long sharp br-r-r and remained motionless. She got up and went around behind it and peered up— A broken carriage-tape!

She moved the machine to the table and brought another from the inner office. She gave it a little pat of satisfaction as she set it in place. It was a better machine than the one she had been using and the type was different.

She took the copied sheets and tore them across and threw them in the waste-basket before she inserted fresh sheets and carbon and set to work with flying fingers.

Fannie came in and passed to her desk, and presently her machine joined in the clatter.

When John Senior arrived the finished letter lay at Isabel's elbow. She took up the two copies and placed them on his desk and returned to her machine.

John Senior read the letter through and signed it and sealed and stamped it. He laid it on the desk beside him. Then he glanced at Fannie— He seemed to consider a minute. He reached for a

special-delivery stamp and affixed it, speaking over his shoulder——

“See here, Fannie, I want you to take this over to Camden for me. The car is down at the door. You’ll catch the ten-thirty if you go right off. Tell Sturgis to drive you straight to the Camden post-office.”

She got up with a grimace of pleasure and went to the closet, casting a look of triumph at Isabel as she passed. John Senior handed her the letter.

“You’ll have to hustle!” he said. They heard her high heels clattering down the hall. The room was silent again.

John Senior gathered a handful of letters and made notes and summoned Isabel.

“Might as well get these out of the way,” he said.

She came over and seated herself. He dictated swiftly for a few minutes. He took up the last letter on the pile and scowled at it and seemed to search for words—and tossed it to her.

“You fix that up. Tell ’em I won’t stand for any more damn nonsense!” She received it in silence and made a note. She glanced at John Senior. He was gazing with satisfaction at his cleared desk. She hesitated a second——

“I wanted to speak to you about something—if you’re not too busy?”

“Fire away!” he granted carelessly.

“It’s about my pay— I’ve got to have more money.” He turned. He was staring at her.

“I mean I need more,” she hurried on. His mouth tightened. He was gazing down at his finger-

nails. . . . It was the first time such a thing had ever happened in Berwick's Mill— And from *Isabel!* If the desk under his tight fingers had risen up and demanded more pay he could not have been more astonished.

"What do you want it for?" he demanded. She flushed a little.

"I need it," she repeated.

"You said that before— What for?"

The flush deepened. "I need a—a new hat!" she said swiftly.

John Senior turned and gazed at her. There was suspicion in his eye— So that was it! He had suspected as much—yesterday. . . . Well, John Junior should have a typewriter in his own office and do his own copying after this. He was not going to have Isabel's head turned with any nonsense—and wanting to look pretty. He gazed at her slowly.

She was pretty—there was no denying it—with the little soft flush in her cheeks.

"That's no reason I should pay you higher wages—a new hat!" he said paternally. "You ought to have looked ahead and saved something. A young girl like you—with nobody but yourself to look out for ought to be able to dress on ten dollars a week!" He ran his eye over the blue serge. The innocent-sounding remark was wary.

He had a shrewd suspicion of Aaron Merton's drug-store and the back-room. He meant to look into it.

But no employee was going to hold him up for

higher wages—not while he was master in his own mill. He continued to look at her keenly.

She sat with lips pressed together looking down.

“Can’t ye?” he pursued. She raised her clear eyes and regarded him.

“I told you I *needed* it,” she said. Her gaze did not drop. “And the stenographers in Camden get twenty and twenty-five a week,” she added.

He stirred sharply. “That’s Camden!” he said. “And they’re girls away from home. They have board to pay. You don’t have to pay any board, living at home.”

She considered it impartially. She did not tell him that she paid more than board at home. She was taking it as he presented it to her—as an economic problem, and he watched her shrewdly.

“But if I don’t have to pay board, because I live at home, I should think you ought to pay me just as much. It is *my* good luck that I don’t have to pay board, isn’t it—and not yours?” She looked at him again with clear eyes, and John Senior laughed shortly.

“We might split the difference!” he said dryly. In his heart he was a little proud of the girl, with her clear thinking and sturdy common-sense. But she needn’t think she was going to hold him up! He patted the desk a little with his fingers.

“It isn’t a thing for you to argue about, Bel—because it happens to be *my* mill. I own it and I am the one to decide what wages are paid.” His eyes considered it impartially again.

"Then I shall have to go somewhere else," she said. It was not a threat. It was hardly addressed to him. She was merely looking his facts in the face. And they were John Senior's facts.

He wished he had been a little less precipitate.

"I don't say I sha'n't pay you more—raise you from time to time," he said cautiously. "But *I* am the one to decide when." He spoke kindly. She shook her head.

"I need it now. I must earn twenty dollars a week after this." He noticed uneasily that she did not say "You must pay me twenty dollars a week——"

She sat a moment, silent.

"How long a notice do I give you?" she asked.

"Why—you can't leave me, Bel—like that! After being here so long— And you were promoted only last fall!"

"Yes. But of course if you can't pay it, I have to go. I don't like to leave you. I like working here."

If she had been shrewd and calculating he would have known how to deal with her. It was the friendliness, the quiet assumption that he would be glad to pay her if he could, that he was thinking of both their interests in the matter—that undid him. That and the fact that she was invaluable to him. He should never find another stenographer that suited him right down to the ground the way Isabel did.

He drummed on the desk a minute. "You couldn't get along with a little less?" he hazarded. She shook her head.

"I don't think I ought to."

"Well—all right." He seemed to dismiss it as not after all so important.

"All right!" he acquiesced.

"When does it begin?" she asked quietly.

"The first of the month."

"That's to-day."

He laughed shortly. "Begins to-day," he grunted. He looked down at his desk——

"You don't need to say anything about it to Fannie," he remarked casually. She was gathering up her papers. She paused.

"I can't promise that—not if she asks me."

"I didn't say you'd got to promise but I said you didn't need to tell her. . . . What was I dictating when you interrupted me?" She held out the letter in her hand.

"You told me to answer this." He glanced at it——

"Oh— Yes. Well—tell 'em to go to hell—I won't stand any more from 'em!" She made a quiet note and smiled.

"Yes, sir. I'll tell them."

He grunted and got up and went toward the next room.

"There's one thing I forgot to speak about," said Isabel slowly. He wheeled sharply.

"Well?" It was not propitious.

"He came back last night."

"*Who* came back?"

"Mr. Braithwaite—that's his name, isn't it—the one who was here?" John stared a minute.

"What did he want?"

"He said his daughter left her scarf and he drove over to get it." John Senior's hands were thrust in his pockets.

"Humph!" he said.

"Well—did he find it?"

"No— It wasn't here. She must have left it somewhere else."

"Pshaw!" he muttered. "Scarf!— What time was it?"

"About six. I was copying for John Junior—a poem." He raised his eyes.

"John here?" he asked. She flushed a little.

"No, sir. He came in and asked for you after you had gone. But he didn't stay."

"Yes, I know— He was late getting home. Well—you told Braithwaite he could go back to—Camden, I suppose?" His eye twinkled.

"I told him I hadn't seen any scarf."

"Nor anybody else!" said Berwick.

"Hello!" He turned. John Junior was in the door. He carried something in his hand. He held it out.

"This belong to anybody here?" It trailed, floating—a filmy yellow thing with black lines and gold tracing embroidery on the ends. John Senior looked at it.

"Damn!" he said slowly.

"Where'd you get it?"

"In my room."

John Senior turned and went into his office and

shut the door. His son gazed at the door. He looked at Isabel.

“Just busy, I guess.” She was smiling. “That’s Miss Braithwaite’s scarf.”

“How do you know?”

“Her father came back for it last night—to see if she had left it. Do you want I should mail it to her?” He looked at the scarf and at Isabel——

“I’m going over to Camden this afternoon. I might take it along. Save you the trouble.”

“Oh, very well.” She held her chin a little high.

John Junior went out. He carried the scarf on his arm. The ends fluttered a little.

XIV

WHEN Fannie returned Isabel was clacking fast. Her head bent to the machine glinted in the light of the window.

Fannie glanced as she went past. She stopped——
“Hello! Got your hair done a new way!” She surveyed it from behind——

“Quite a stunt!” she pronounced.

“Don’t interrupt, Fannie!”

“All right.” She went on to the closet. In a minute she emerged, the hat with its velvet band balanced on her hand. . . .

“Look at that, will you! . . . What’s up?” she demanded sternly. She came over twirling the hat on her hand and surveying it.

“Can’t say I like it so very well,” she said critically. “Neat but not gaudy! What you up to, Bel, with all these new dumpty-things?”

“Nothing,” said Isabel with a smile. “Run along, please.”

Fannie returned the hat to the closet.

“Got a beau?” she asked, popping out.

“No.”

“Think you’ll get one, I suppose!— Humph!”

“Don’t be silly!”

“Oh— La-la! You can’t fool me.”

Fannie proceeded to her window. “I don’t like

the hat anyway. You better put the other thing back on it."

"I can't— Gave it away."

"Buy some more."

"I'm going to have a new one," said Isabel with a fleeting smile.

"A new hat!"

She nodded. There was a faint little flush in her face. Fannie glared at it.

"Ah-ha! What did I tell you!" She attacked the machine. "My Lord!— New hats!"

John Senior's head appeared in the doorway. He glanced at Fannie and at her machine— Her head was absorbed in its work. Her fingers flew. Radiant efficiency emanated from her.

John Senior's glance was grim. He turned it to Isabel.

"Where's the machine that was in my room?" he asked. She looked up with puzzled gaze.

"Oh— I forgot! I had to take it. My carriage-tape snapped." She nodded to it on the table and he came over. He examined it.

"Have to be sent away," he grumbled.

"Yes. I'm sorry. But it's lucky we've got the extra one!" She touched it with her finger. "I like it better than mine," she said approvingly.

"I told John he could have that one," said Berwick quickly. She looked up in surprise.

"Does he want it?— Any machine, I mean. I thought he hated typewriting."

"I told him he could have it," said Berwick. "He

will have to wait now." He scowled at the machine.

"It won't be more than a couple of weeks," said Isabel. Her fingers hovered about the keys and there was a little flush in her face. He looked at it grimly. He had been none too soon. . . . Isabel was a nice girl but she was not the wife he had picked out for John Junior. He was not going to stand any nonsense. Besides he couldn't spare her— A new machine would cost a hundred. Isabel was worth—? His eyes narrowed to it.

"I think I'll get him a new one," he said generously. "We need another anyway and you can keep that one if you like it better." The flush in her face deepened.

John Junior's step was coming along the hall. It stopped outside the door. His father looked up over his glasses.

"I've come for that machine," said the young man.

"Well, you can't have it to-day. We can't spare it."

"Bother!" said John Junior.

"Can't you wait—a day?" asked his father a little testily.

"Oh, I can wait. Yes. What's that one doing?" He motioned to the table. "Why can't I have that?"

"Broken— Take two weeks to fix it. I'm going to get you a new one." His father spoke propitiatingly—a hundred dollars' worth.

John Junior ignored the hundred dollars.

"I want it now—right off. I've got to get to work to-day. Can I have Bel?"

"No," said his father curtly. "You can not."

Fannie from her window cast a flying glance—

"You don't need any two weeks for that machine!" she said scornfully. John Senior turned.

"What's that you say?"

She nodded competently. "Send over to the Commercial School in Camden. They will have a man here in half an hour to fix it. Cost you less, too."

John Senior glared. "You sure about that?"

She nodded. "Want I should telephone?"

"Go ahead!"

She went to the desk with the little airy flourish of skirts that hinted at wings.

"Hello— Give me one-nine-three-eight, please." She bent her ear. Her voice took on the high note of refinement— "Is Mr. Hodgkins there? Mr. Samuel Hodgkins. Yes. Tell him I want to speak with him. . . . Never you mind who it is calling! You run along!" She listened a minute—"Run along!" she said tersely.

She listened smiling competently.

"Is this Mr. Hodgkins?" Her voice purred a little. "This is Fannie Blakeley calling—Berwick's Mill, you know."

She listened again and giggled.

"That's all right. . . . Well— Say—look! Listen! Can you come over here right off—to fix a machine that's gone dippy . . . what?"

"Yes, carriage-tape broke. . . . What! All right." She hung up and swung about on her chair, coming with a swirl of her skirts from far-distant space.

"He'll be right along over," she said in the matter of fact tone of every day. She returned to her work. John Berwick's face beamed.

"You can take that along with you," he said to John Junior. He nodded to the machine on the table. "Have him fix it in your room. Save time and bother."

John Junior bore it away. His father glanced casually at Fannie by her window. Her face was immovable and her gaze fixed on the keys was austere. Her fingers darted at them in little stabs.

"Did you get my letter there in time?" he asked pleasantly.

She nodded without stopping.

"Just made it. . . . He'd got the mail-bag tied up, but he undid it."

"Decent of him," said John Senior.

"Yes." She drew out the finished sheet. "I reckon he wouldn't 'a' done it just for me!" She blew at the sheet lightly making erasures. "Only the man that was here yesterday, Braithwaite—he came along and he saw I was late and he offered to take it in with his."

John Senior's mouth stared. It came together with a snap. "Braithwaite mailed—my letter?"

"Yes. He was real polite about it." She laid

aside the sheet. "He's got political pull, all right," she said carelessly. "The old man opened the bag and popped them all in, easy as you please."

"Well—of all the—damned luck!" said Berwick under his breath.

She nodded complacently. "Couldn't 'a' done it except for him—getting there just the minute he did. *He* was late too!"

John Berwick made no reply. He wheeled about abruptly and went toward the inner office. The door slammed with firmness. Fannie looked up.

"Didn't even say thank you!" she murmured. "Well, I had a dandy ride anyhow! Suits *me* all right to be rich!" She studied the coils of Isabel's hair reflectively.

"Say, Honey—I wouldn't mind your doing *my* hair like that—for a try!" Isabel shook her head.

"It wouldn't suit you," she said.

"I'll promise not to make a fuss——"

"I mean it's not your style!"

"Oh!" She considered it. "It certainly looks all right on you. I saw John Junior looking at it——"

"Silly!" said Isabel.

"John?" Fannie laughed. "He did, though. Couldn't hardly take his eyes off. . . . You don't think it would suit my style then?"

"No," said Isabel shortly. Then her mouth relaxed. "I'll do yours this noon if you want me to—another way." She gazed at her critically, her eyes narrowing a little, as if she looked at something that pleased her.

“You want little curly things on the sides and around your face—light and fluffy—like you!”

“My land!” said Fannie softly. Isabel smiled.

“You’ll see,” she replied sagely.

XV

JOHN JUNIOR carried the typewriter to his room. He placed it on the table and looked at it. It seemed to jar with the yellow silk fringe of the lamp-shade. He brought out a stand and put it by the window, and moved back a few paces and regarded it thoughtfully. . . .

He selected finally a corner in the recess back of the projecting wall. The light was dim in the recess, but the machine was out of sight. He fingered the keys absently, wondering whether he would be able to use it without too much annoyance. . . . It was always so pleasant to dictate to Isabel. He often thought of happy lines and verses while he was dictating to her. He smiled with the vision of her and the light of the window shining behind her. He should miss having her to dictate to— But it was certainly a good thing to have a typewriter of his own— If only he had a place for it. . . .

It would be a great convenience not to wait on his father's plans when he was in a hurry to get things off. . . . He would finish something now and copy it as soon as the man put the machine in order. . . . There was the poem on "Dreams." The editor of the *Atlantic* was pretty sure to like that— It had double stanzas.

He hunted out the poem and changed a line and walked back and forth on the rug chanting it in a low grim voice.

The black velvet jacket that he wore when he wanted to coax the poetic mood was frayed. Taken with his informal tie it gave him a somewhat untidy appearance.

The coat was a little dusty now and ruffled from carrying the machine from place to place. As he walked and muttered he ran a hand through his hair, ruffling it. It stood up loosely on his head framing the strong blocked-in features with a rough halo. The dreamy eyes beneath the halo looked out unseeing as he paced the rug.

A knock at the door broke the look. He came back with a start from vast spaces.

“Come in!” It was impatient.

The young man who entered was thin and short, but the light hair brushed sternly upward in its smooth rigid pompadour added several inches to his height. His cuffs, showing well below the sleeve, were immaculate and his pointed shoes were carefully brushed. He might without change of detail have stepped from an advertisement— “This-young-man-studied-with-us-six-months-and-now——”

He came forward briskly.

“A machine gone wrong, I understand,” he said. John ran a dazed hand through his hair, casting off dreams.

“It’s in there!” He waved his hand. The young man moved quickly and disappeared as by magic

in the recess. John eyed the place where he had been, gloomily.

"Carriage-tape, I see," came the crisp voice from behind the wall.

"I believe so, yes." John strolled in.

The young man whisked a little hammer from his sack pocket, a screw-driver and wrench from some other place. He gave a tap and a turn to the machine and drew out the broken ends of the tape, tossing them aside as mere rubbish. He produced a new tape—from his hat apparently, and inserted it. He snapped the ends, joining them with a little twist of the wire, and got up.

"That's done," he said pleasantly. John blinked a little.

The young man was stowing the hammer and screw-driver in his pocket. He was looking about the room with appreciative eyes.

"Nice place you've got here." John's gaze followed the approving gesture. He smiled.

"You think so?" he said modestly.

"Fine— Pictures, books—" He paused in the enumeration and looked at the other young man with a sudden vague gesture—

"You're not young Mr. Berwick, are you?"

John acknowledged it. He held out his hand. The young man grasped it firmly.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure. My name's Hodgkins—Samuel Hodgkins. I've heard of you."

"Sit down, won't you?" said John. He was vaguely flattered by this young man who had heard of him.

"I ought not to stop—business trip—paid by the hour— But I've heard you write—write poetry and so on?" He gazed at him hopefully.

John made a modest gesture.

"There's something I'd like to ask you to do for me," said Hodgkins quickly. "If you aren't too busy?"

John put it aside. "Sit down, won't you?" He motioned again to the chair.

The young man sat down. He crossed his legs. "I can't write poetry myself—not in my line. But I happen to want some—a few lines just now. I wonder if I could get you to do them for me." He put it straight. "I'd be willing to pay for it."

"Well—" John paused and cleared his throat. "Well——"

"It's this way—" said the youth. "I want to send a lily—Easter, you know—next Sunday. And I thought a little poetry would go good with it. She's my lady-friend." He glanced hopefully at John.

"It's a thing I can't do myself or I wouldn't ask anybody to do it for me." . . . His competent face was regretful. "I suppose it's pretty easy for you? And I know it would be all right—anything you'd do. I'd have confidence in the goods—sight unseen." He laughed a little, embarrassed.

"Well—you see—" John hesitated. He brushed a fleck from the velvet coat.

"I am a poet, I suppose. People seem to think the stuff I do is poetry. A number of people have said they like it. I have a good many letters—from

editors and so on." He dismissed them with a modest hand. The young man regarded him unblinking. He waited for the result.

The poet shook his head. A lock from the loose halo dropped to his forehead. He thrust it up.

"I am afraid I couldn't write anything to order like this. . . . You see poetry is difficult business." He motioned toward the recess and his smile was whimsical and friendly. "I couldn't finish it all up in two minutes the way you did."

The young man laughed out, but his face was disappointed.

"I'd be willing to give you time—any amount of time. But it's Sunday, you see. And I've got the lily." He rose to his feet briskly.

"Well, of course if you can't, you can't. I thought I'd just ask you. No harm in asking——?"

"Not in the least," said John heartily.

"I only want a few lines, you know. I could almost do them myself—if it was in my line. . . . Well, good-by! Thank you!" He had recovered his hat. John detained him.

"I could get you something perhaps."

The business face was irradiated. It waited.

"Not anything of my own," said John firmly, "but another poet—Tennyson. I seem to remember a poem of his— Let me see——"

He crossed to the shelves and took out a book and blew off the dust and ran the leaves rapidly through his fingers——

"Ah— Here it is! Yes— I thought so!" He

turned to the waiting face and read the lines in a low rapt voice.

Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the East
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot.

“I say! That’s fine!” said Hodgkins. “*She’s* in a room that’s high up—not a tower exactly. I guess you couldn’t call it a tower—but there’s a window she looks out of a good deal. . . . I don’t know’s it’s exactly east— Which way is east here?” He whirled about searching the compass.

John pointed.

“That’s it! Then it *is* the east—her room!” He glanced at the book in John’s hand.

“Seems almost like one of those things that’s meant to be!” he said in a tone of awe. “Would you mind reading it again, please?”

John read it again with pleasure.

“It’s a queer name!” said Hodgkins reflectively. “Elaine— Maybe I could put her name in instead.” He bent to the book, a hand on either knee, and read the lines, muttering them thoughtfully—trying them out with the alien name. He straightened.

“Well, it don’t go quite so smooth maybe, but it’s all right! . . . You can’t expect everything in a poem—that you didn’t do yourself.” His briskness had returned. He was alive with hope and the kindness of life.

"Now, I'll just make a copy of that—if you don't mind." He took out a pencil. It was very sharp. John motioned it away.

"I'm going to give you the book," he said. "I have another and I'd like you to have this copy." He took out his fountain pen and wrote on the blank page——

"To Samuel Hodgkins, with best wishes from John Berwick, Jr."

He dated it. He felt a foreshadowing of creative joy in the presentation lines. He saw himself inscribing endless volumes to waiting young men. He handed it over with a friendly smile.

"There you are!"

"Well, I'm sure I thank you." He received it gravely. "It means a lot to me!"

"Not at all!" said John. "I am glad to do it. I only wish I could have let you have something of my own!" It was regretful and kind.

"Oh, this is all right—better maybe!" He walked to the door and turned.

"I shall make no charge for the machine," he said briskly.

John listened to his retreating footsteps. He threw himself on the terra-cotta couch and looked up dreamily at the ceiling. . . . Probably there were others—other people he had never heard of or seen who knew he was a poet—and wrote poetry! And there would be others who would know. The brisk footsteps in the hall grew faint and died away. But John's ear did not note their passing. It

was listening to cadenced measures and to the murmur of applauding voices sounding through dim space . . . coming to him down the path of the years.

XVI

FANNIE from her window looked down into the street.

"Come here, Bel!" she cried. "Come quick—or he'll be gone!"

Isabel hurried. The young man below stood by a car, one foot on the running-board. He was gazing up at the window. He lifted his hat with a gesture that revealed the whole of the carefully brushed pompadour. He replaced the hat covering the pompadour and mounted the car. He drew on his gloves, raised his hat again to the window and seized the wheel. The Ford motor-truck went chugging down the street.

Fannie leaned far out. She drew back with shining eyes.

"Now what do you think of that!" she demanded.

"Did you know him?" asked Isabel.

"Know him! He is my gentleman-friend!" It left nothing to be said.

"I never heard you speak of him," said Isabel.

"Well, I don't have to gabble all I know, do I! His name's Hodgkins—Samuel Hodgkins. He's first assistant over to the Commercial School in Camden. It was him I was telephoning to this morning about the machine."

“He’s been very quick!” said Isabel. She glanced at the clock.

“Quick! I should say so! Sometimes you don’t know whether he is coming or going—he is so quick! Makes up his mind—and won’t take ‘no’! She sighed. Isabel considered it.

“He looks nice and kind,” she said thoughtfully.

“He’s an awfully nice fellow!” allowed Fannie with conviction. “But I do’ no’—!” She said it inconsequently and cast off decision. Her fingers returned to the keys.

In the inner office behind the closed door John Senior could be heard moving restlessly about.

“Old man’s rumptious!” said Fannie over her shoulder.

But John Senior was more than rumptious. He was mad—mad all through at the turn of Fate that had dropped his letter to Moulton into Eben Braithwaite’s outstretched hand. . . . He flung himself into a chair and hunched his shoulders and looked at it.

He could not accuse Braithwaite of hanging around the post-office waiting for his letter. But Braithwaite was too keen not to take advantage of it when it dropped into his hand like that!— And special-delivery too! It was the limit—to have it happen just like that!

Braithwaite was on the jump for this Moulton deal. He knew there was something in the air—though he could not have any idea yet. Now he had the address he would lose no time finding out. That

gang of political sharps that used him to pull their chestnuts out of the fire would make a fat haul! John Berwick shrugged his shoulders a little higher and glared at his desk. His coat-collar was hunched up about his ears and he settled down more firmly in his chair. . . .

The weak point was Moulton— You couldn't trust Moulton. . . . He was all right so long as no other parties approached him. And he was bound by a cast-iron oath— No one else was to know of the option or to know that he controlled the right to sell the option on an oil territory that would probably yield richer than any other tract in the southwest—make millionaires of the men who got it.

Probably. . . . Yes.

That was the rub! If he were certain! Or he could take time to run out there and see for himself!

He chewed on it a while.

Then he opened the door. He nodded briskly to Isabel.

"Come in here," he said. "I want to dictate."

The pencil made rapid notes of the words flung at her, and as usual he quieted down under her assured movements. The dictation ran smoothly to the end.

"That's all," he said curtly.

"When do you go?" she asked. She gathered up her work.

"This afternoon."

"And when do you come back?"

"Devil knows!" he growled.

She moved unperturbed toward the door. He

looked grimly at the comfortable unhurried line of her back and shoulder.

"You better ask Him!" he said chuckling. "He knows more about this business than anybody else, I guess." She did not turn her head but he caught the glimpse of a smile around the edge of her cheek.

"I want you to keep an eye on things here, you understand? He will likely be around these parts—soon as my back is turned."

She nodded with a little gesture of assent and closed the door gently behind her.

Fannie looked up curiously.

"Thunderheads?" she asked sweetly.

"No. Just a breeze," said Isabel. "Wind's changing, I guess."

Fannie glanced again at the shining coils of hair.

"My! But I can't hardly wait till noon!" she said. "Think of *me*—and *that*!"

At noon she yielded herself with a look of glorified expectation.

"I just *love* to have my hair fussed over," she murmured. With a little ecstatic sigh she leaned back and closed her eyes. The apron pinned about her neck added to the cherubic effect.

Isabel's swift fingers let down the hair about the beatific expression and reached for a comb. She ran it through the scant locks toward the scalp causing each separate hair to spring back as the comb hovered lightly and invited it skilfully, and little natural curls seemed to shake themselves loose

from it and frame the upturned face and tilted nose and celestial expression of bliss.

"You've got lovely hair!" said Isabel, diving at it with swiftly-stabbing pins.

"Awful thin!" said Fannie apologetically.

"Yes. You ought to do something—massage it—every night!" She scowled at it thoughtfully and readjusted a lock and stood back again, her fingertips upraised. So the artist retreats from his canvas, striving to catch the glow on the tip of a brush and pin it forever.

She darted at it and touched it lightly—little electric pats that evoked it swiftly.

"I'm almost asleep!" murmured Fannie.

"It's done!" said Isabel. She laughed happily. "Get up and look at yourself!"

Fannie regarded it with a look of awe. She twisted her neck and looked as far behind as nature permitted.

"I can't see the back," she said regretfully, "but the front is *sweet*! I don't see how you ever did it—Just too cute for words, Bel!" She laid down the glass. "You got to show me how!" she said solemnly.

"All right! To-morrow. Let's come down to the fence—show it to them!"

"Wait a minute— You can't spring a thing like that on 'em sudden—all in a minute! Take their breath away!"

She moved to the window and leaned out carelessly. She looked down on the crowd by the fence.

. . . Some one gazed up and waved a hand and gazed again.

“Look at Fannie Blakeley, girls!— Will you look!”

“What’s up, Fan? Who’s your barber?”

“Like it?” called Fannie. She turned a proud head and gave a back view.

“Dandy!— Who did it? Come on down!”

She descended and they gathered about her and commented and laughed. The morning papers were full of a world crisis. But nothing in the papers had moved them like Fannie Blakeley’s hair. . . . Something had happened to Fannie! The little curls seemed to evoke some spirit within her that had been in hiding—waiting the magic touch. She carried her head with smiling lightness. She rose on her toes a little and held herself poised to their admiring gaze.

“It’s all right, Fan!” They moved about her breathless.

“Who did it?” She nodded to the artist. Isabel, a little to one side, stood regarding her handiwork with thoughtful growing vision. . . . She would do it a little higher next time, she thought.

“Oh Bel!” “You sweet thing!”— “Do mine— will you?” “And mine!” They crowded on her, pushing.

She fended them off and moved back laughing and nodding. There was a little glow of happiness in her face.

“To-morrow,” she said.

The bell in the factory struck sharply. The whistles took the note and blew shrilly.

The crowd dissolved and vanished. And in each fluttering head was a little image of itself turned inside out, transformed, beatific in curls and lightness.

If the history of the transformation of heads that went on in Berwick's Mill were to be set down in full the world could not contain the books that would be written. They would give the biography of a hundred girls and all the thoughts and feelings evoked in them—especially the feelings. . . . Dim, unguessed little gropings that came when they looked at themselves in the glass—that Isabel always withheld sternly till the last pin was stabbled firmly in place and the final lock adjusted.

Then the girl looked and beheld a new face in the glass—dark or light, dignified or petite—and smiling at her. And the girl smiled back and tossed her head a little.

Perhaps the hair went back next day to the old lines—perhaps the clumsy fingers could not achieve the ideal that for a crowding moment had looked out from the glass.

But they never forgot.

Feet and hands and arms moved toward it. Somewhere it waited for them.

XVII

ELLEN BRAITHWAITE came down the room with cordial extended hand.

"I am so glad to see you!"

"What is it?" She bent her near-sighted gaze to something the young man held in his hand——

"My scarf!" she said quickly. "How good of you! I had quite given it up!" She took it from him, patting it a little.

"I am foolishly fond of it," she said.

"Sit down——" She moved with a little gesture to a chair, and he sat down near her.

He had not intended to stay. But something in the slow gesture made it seem rude to hurry away——and made him want to stay.

She patted the scarf again where it lay on her knee. "I am ridiculously fond of it—I bought it in Rome—at a little place in the Quirinal."

John leaned forward, looking at it intently.

"That is what I remembered!" he said quickly, "——where I saw that sort of thing. It kept coming back to me making me think of something——like a word you try to remember and can't."

"You've been there?" she asked, pleased.

"They keep photographs, don't they?"

She regarded the scarf a little quizzically. "I think so——yes."

He saw suddenly the Mona Lisa smiling down on

him from the wall. He could not have told why he thought of her just then—except that she was his largest photograph.

“I got several things there, I remember—if it is the same place——?”

“Near the Palace. Just a few doors farther on.”

“Yes! That’s it! I was crazy about photographs. I bought them everywhere!”

She smiled, looking at him curiously. “And you don’t care for them now?”

“I don’t know what I care for now,” he said frankly. “But if I were in Rome again I know I shouldn’t buy photographs. I’d rather have something like that.” He nodded to the scarf on her knee.

She lifted it, letting the ends float out.

“*You* couldn’t wear a thing like that!”

“No. But I could give it to some one!” he said confidently. She glanced up quickly—and then away.

“I should not want you to give *my* scarf to anyone. It is my particular property, you know!”

“Haven’t I returned it to you safe?” said John. He had a sudden sense of exhilaration in talking with her. Her words seemed to mean more than they said—all sorts of things that made his blood tingle and his heart beat swiftly.

She was regarding him with her slow smiling gaze. She nodded.

“You returned it this time, yes— But how do I know I could always trust you? If you had

seen it first and bought it first?" The shimmering folds lay on her knee. She stroked them a little.

John noted how white her hand was passing back and forth on the scarf. The slow movement seemed to fascinate him.

He got to his feet. "I must be driving back," he said.

"Oh!" She tossed the scarf aside and got up. "You must stay for tea with me. I'll ring for it now."

She moved across the room, and he waited irresolute.

"Come," she said quickly, "I want to show you my garden while they are bringing it in."

She took him out through a French window to the terrace and showed him the Russian violets blooming in a protected bed below the terrace. There were snowdrops scattered about through the grass, and crocuses and hyacinths were coming into bloom. A little beyond, the greenhouses revealed through their glass walls masses of lilies growing in pots.

"Ugly things, aren't they," she said, looking in on the banked lilies.

"The gardener raises them for market on commission. He crowds the greenhouse with them. But they will be gone to-morrow. They cart them away in loads just before Easter."

John's gaze sought the glass walls with the white bells shining through.

"Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat," he murmured, trying vaguely to recall something. . . . And sud-

denly Samuel Hodgkins's pompadour shot up before him. He laughed out.

"I remember!" he said. He told her the incident of the lily-poem. She watched with lazy half-shut eyes while he told it.

They returned to the house and she poured his tea. John laughed and talked and she smiled back lazily. . . . He was in another world. This was the way he used to feel in Europe—he remembered, with the old churches and pictures—and beautiful things everywhere. He had thought then he should never come home. He wondered a little now why he had come.

"Don't you get homesick?" he asked suddenly. She was pouring fresh water on the silver ball. She paused and lifted it and shook it a little.

"Homesick?" she asked. She raised her eyebrows a trifle.

"You don't belong here, you know. You belong over there where that came from." He nodded to the scarf.

"Oh." She turned her head. She smiled subtly. Her father was coming in.

"Here is Mr. Berwick," she said quietly. "He brought my scarf. Do you want some tea?"

He greeted the young man affably and took the tea and chatted a few minutes. When he got up to go he left John with a pleasant feeling that he was of importance.

"I must keep an engagement. I am sorry. Come again, Berwick." At the door he turned back carelessly.

"Ah—what is the best time I wonder to see your father— When is he most likely to be disengaged? I am going to be in Hanover to-morrow. I thought I'd run in."

"He's not at home now," said John regretfully. "He's been away several days."

"You don't happen to know his address, I suppose?" It was a careless question.

"Sorry I don't, sir. He was going west I believe— back where we used to live— But I didn't ask him."

"It's of no consequence," the man dismissed it.

But John Junior's face held it with a smile.

"His secretary would know—Miss Merton. I'll call her up!"

"No-no,"— Braithwaite laid a detaining hand on the arm of the young man as he came toward the door.

"It's not worth the trouble! Besides—" He took out his watch and glanced at it. "It's after hours."

John's look dropped to the watch with a quick exclamation.

"Half past six! You must forgive me, Miss Braithwaite—for staying so long!" He came over to the table, and his hostess smiled up at him and held out her friendly hand.

"Stay to dinner, won't you? We should be glad to have you."

"Yes—stay," said Braithwaite from the door. But John shook his head.

"I should never get away if I stayed as long as I want to," he said laughing. "Thank you for the tea."

“And thank you for my scarf— You will come again?”

“Yes, I shall come again. I shall certainly come again,” he said with emphasis. She smiled slightly at the earnestness.

“Bring your father with you when he returns,” she said lightly.

“Father?” John started. Then he laughed. “I don’t believe father ever took afternoon-tea in his life!” he asserted.

“Time he did!” she responded. “We’ll make him. Tell him it will do him good.”

“I am sure it would,” said John, “if he takes it with you!”

She only smiled a little. And when he bent over her hand in parting if there was a little more emphasis in the gesture than seemed called for, she did not appear to notice.

And John driving home toward the house on the hill was thinking exultantly and swiftly how lucky it was he carried the scarf himself instead of letting Isabel send it. He would have missed a very pleasant afternoon if Isabel had sent the scarf by mail.

XVIII

THE evening was cool, and Eben Braithwaite seated after dinner before the fire in the library held out his long thin hands to the blaze and caressed his fingers. His eyes studied the leaping flames. There was a little line between the thoughtful eyes.

He leaned back and reached to the pile of magazines beside him and selected a weekly and spread it on his knees.

"By the way, Nell—there's something I'd like you to do for me," he said casually.

She put down her novel.

"Yes, dad?"

She removed the cigarette from her lips— A light cloud of thoughtful smoke blew toward him.

"What is it?" she asked quietly.

He turned the pages of the weekly—

"Ask that little girl we saw the other day in Berwick's office over for tea some day— Will you?"

She put the cigarette to her lips and blew a puff—and then another.

"What do you mean, dad?" The tone was quiet.

He moved an assuring hand.

"Nothing."

"Why do you want her?"

"Business," he replied.

She turned it over and shook her head and smiled across at him.

"I don't feel sure I could trust you," she said sternly.

He was leaning back in his chair, watching her. The weekly lay untouched on his knee.

"Oh yes, you can trust me," he said lazily. "I promise—to play fair. . . . I told you the other day, Nell, I've got to get ahead of Berwick if we stay here." He lifted a hand from the arm of his chair with a half-gesture at the room. It included the comfortable flames on the hearth.

"We've got to give it up—if I can't put this thing over— We can't go off to Europe the way we used to—live on nothing, with a care-taker in charge here. All that Europe business is off for a good while. The war knocked it silly! We'll have to sell out if we can't stay on here in comfort.

She glanced about her with a little shiver and a look of reluctance.

"California?" she asked. "Japan?"

"Nothing doing!" he returned. "It costs too much! The good old days are over, Nell! . . . There are still a few plums left," he added reflectively, "and Berwick's getting ready to pick them. It's only a question of his basket—or mine!" She smiled slightly.

"I don't mind asking *him* over," she admitted. "That's fair fighting." Her eyes seemed to see the short determined figure, and she laughed out. "*He* can take care of himself," she said almost proudly. "But this little girl—what is her name?" She leaned forward.

"Merton," said Braithwaite shortly. "Her father keeps that hole of a drug-store where we stopped to get a thermos cork one day."

"Oh— I remember——"

"Not much money there," he returned, suggestively. She made no reply. Her face studied the flames. Her cigarette had gone out. She dropped it to the tray beside her. The man watched her uneasily.

"It's just between me and Berwick," he said, "which of us gets in ahead—that's all. He's got something. I can't put my finger on it—not yet. I've written to an address I happened to get hold of the other day. I was going to go on there myself." He laughed shortly. "You heard what young Berwick said—that his father's away?"

"Yes."

"He's there looking things over— I'd stake anything you'd like on it. . . . But he's cautious—and not likely to strike till he is sure. . . . And if I could talk with the little girl I have an idea she knows things. She would give him away without knowing she was doing it— That's fair!" He looked at her inquiringly. She assented.

"Yes, I suppose so," she sighed. "Well, I'll do it, dad." She got up. "But remember—I shall watch you like an old hen! You are not to philander with that child. It's straight business?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"All I want is a chance to get ahead of Berwick," he said curtly, "and get some money. We've got

to have money—or go to the dogs. The whole crowd needs money.”

She passed behind the back of his chair, and her hand touched his hair and ruffled it with affectionate touch.

“You are getting gray, old man,” she said lightly. He picked up the weekly.

“I shall get grayer—if we don’t look out,” he replied.

She crossed to her writing-desk and wrote the note and tore it up and wrote another.

“How will that do?” She stood behind his chair and he reached up a hand for it——

MY DEAR MISS MERTON,—

I enjoyed our little visit the other day in Mr. Berwick’s office, and I am writing to ask if you will not come some day for a cup of tea with me. I do not know about trains, but if you could let me know what day is convenient I should like to send the car. Then I shall be sure to be at home and not miss you.

Cordially yours,

ELLEN BRAITHWAITE.

He read it and returned it.

“That’s all right,” he said. “You write nice notes, Nell. I only hope she will come.”

“Oh she will come,” said Ellen. She was sealing the note, looking over it at the fire. “She will come,” she repeated with soft decision.

“Now how do you feel so sure?” he asked teasingly. The lines between his eyes had relaxed— He smiled and reached for a cigar.

She seated herself on the other side of the fire.

"She will come because she is a woman," she said. She leaned forward looking at the flames.

He paused, with the lighted match at the end of the cigar.

"Naturally," he said smiling.

"That means because she will be curious," she added.

He tossed away the match and drew a quick breath and let it out——

"Naturally again! But curious about what?" He puffed easily. He was at peace with the world. She looked at him with amused affectionate eyes.

"She will be curious why I asked her, and that will put her on her guard."

"You think so?" He watched the smoke lazily. "Well, I will risk it— A little girl like that."

XIX

HER mother pointed to it on the table when she came in——

“There’s a letter for you. I don’t know anybody in Camden that would be writing to you?”

Isabel opened it and read it slowly. There was a little flush in her cheeks.

“It’s from Miss Braithwaite,” she said. “She wants me to come over to see her some day.”

“What for?” said her mother.

“Here, you can read it,” said the girl. She handed it to her.

“Of course I can’t go,” she added.

“Why not?” demanded her mother. She looked at her over the letter. “Why not, I should like to know!”

“Well——” Isabel hesitated. Then a smile touched her lip.

“I haven’t anything to wear—for one thing.” It was as good a reason as another. . . . Besides she was not sure——

“Wear your new dress,” said her mother.

“My new dress?— I couldn’t!”

“You think it isn’t nice enough, I suppose— It’s going to be real pretty!” she added quickly. “Miss Sparks has got the skirt cut out.”

“It’s *too* nice—I mean too dressed up, isn’t it—

just to go over there in the afternoon." She touched the note.

"She says a cup of tea," persisted her mother. She too touched the note where it lay between them.

"Well anyway—it isn't finished," said Isabel.

"You go right over to Miss Sparks's as soon as you've had your supper. You tell her she must work on it—so you can have it to-morrow—or next day sure."

"Why mother!" laughed Isabel. "I never knew you to act so!"

"I want you to have good times," said her mother quickly. "That's what we are doing the dress for, isn't it—dyeing it and fussing over it and all?"

"Yes, I suppose so. . . . I haven't thought what it was for. I just wanted it."

"Well that's silly! Clothes are made to wear. That's what they're for! You don't want clothes unless you can wear 'em, do you?"

"I don't know!" laughed Isabel. "But I'll go over and see Miss Sparks after supper— It can't do any harm," she added.

"Harm! I should think not!"

"No," assented Isabel. But there was a little thoughtful line between her eyes as she ate her supper. . . . Why should Miss Braithwaite ask her? She saw suddenly the tall courteous man looking down at her and inquiring suavely for a forgotten scarf— But the scarf *had* been left. It was in John Junior's office then. It was silly to be suspicious of any one! She got up.

"I'm going over to Miss Sparks's now," she announced.

"Want I should come with you?" asked her mother. "I can leave the dishes." It was half-wistful.

"Yes, you come," said Isabel. "You can tell me how it hangs."

The door into the dressmaker's back room stood ajar, and they went in. The dress lay on the bed, spread like a gay shroud over the white coverlid. The mother surveyed it with quick eager eyes.

"You've got it out real good, Miss Sparks."

"Yes, I had pretty good luck," said the little dressmaker modestly.

"Want to try it on, Bel?"

Isabel nodded. There was a shining light in her eyes that spread over her face. She took off the shabby hat in its blue velvet band and undid the serge dress, letting it fall about her feet. It lay like a calyx sheath about her as she stood straight and tall and unconscious in her youth. The clean white under-garments, the curves of her arms and shoulders rising from them to the neck and uplifted chin, gave an austere half-awakened charm to the face that regarded the dress on the bed with absorbed look. Her lips were parted in a little smile.

"It's going to be lovely!" she said. She held out her arms and bent her head to receive it.

The dressmaker slipped it over the bent head and adjusted the folds with quick touch. The kerosene lamp lighted up her puckered face as she circled

about, half-bending and looking up and tapping at the clothed figure.

From the shadow the mother's face regarded it happily.

The dressmaker dropped to her knees. "Now you turn slow, Bel, while I pin," she said solemnly.

She filled her mouth with the pins and bent to the floor, inverting her head, gazing up raptly.

The silk-clad figure revolved slowly. The pins flew at it. The dressmaker sat back on her heels——

"You think that's about the right length, Mis' Merton?" she mumbled to the shadow beyond the lamp, and the mother leaned forward.

"Walk off a little, Bel," she commanded. Her eyes followed the advancing feet with stern glance——

"You don't think it's a little mite too short?"

"They wear 'em awful short," mumbled the pins.

"Yes, I know they do." A sigh assented to it.

"Well, I guess that will do."

The feet beneath the silk folds made little dancing tentative steps of happiness.

"Stand still, Bel! You'll lose out the pins!"

"Yes, that looks good!" The mother sank back in her chair, the dressmaker inverted her head on the floor, and the silk figure revolved again. The dull light fell on it and reached up dimly to the flushed cheeks and eyes that were changing to the shining light of stars.

"I declare, Bel Merton, you are going to have a

lovely dress out of it!" The dressmaker sank to the floor and gazed.

The stars looked down on her.

"How does it fit in the back?" asked Isabel.

"Turn 'round!" She smoothed it. "It's good! Fits as if it had been made for you!" She laughed at her well-worn joke.

"Now about the neck and sleeves—I don't just know—?" She stood off with half-closed eyes gazing.

"I'll show you," said Isabel quickly. "I know. I've been thinking about it— Here, if you have a pencil I can show you." She took the pencil and drew swift lines on the back of an envelope. The dressmaker looked over her shoulder. Her face lighted as the lines grew.

"Yes, I see. That's real pretty! . . . And you have made a picture of yourself besides!" she laughed, gazing at the envelope. The mother came forward and looked——

"Why so 'tis, Bel!"

"Oh, she's prettier than I am," said the girl carelessly. She put the envelope aside. "But it's the way I'm going to do my hair. You have to see the whole thing—to know about the neck. That's the way it ought to look."

"Yes, I can make it like that." The dressmaker returned to it lingeringly. "I shall keep it and use it."

But the girl turned swiftly in the shimmering blue robe——

"You mustn't use it for anybody, Miss Sparks—not a single soul except me!"

"Oh—!" fluttered the dressmaker. Her eyes protested feebly.

"Not for any one!" laughed Isabel. She shook her head. "I will draw you necks—dozens of them—if you want! But they have to be different for different people, you know!"

"Oh, do they?" It was out of uncertain depths. Something in the stars above the robe compelled obedience.

"All right, Bel. I won't use it except on this dress, but you remember you've promised to draw me another one, you know."

"Of course. I'd love to!" said Isabel. "It's fun!"

It did not occur to her or to the dressmaker or to the shadow beyond the lamp that the rapidly sketched head on the old envelope growing under the swift fingers out of a vision within was of the nature of a miracle.

She could do "dozens of them," and the dressmaker accepted it with placid smile.

"Turn around again," she commanded. "Yes, that's all right!"

"Bel wants it to wear to-morrow or next day," ventured the mother.

"To-morrow!" The little woman wheeled. "Why—I couldn't!"

"Well—next day, maybe?"

"I can have it done by Thursday," she said sternly,

“and not a day sooner. You see there’s all that pleating to do!”

“Will that do, do you think, Bel?” asked the mother.

“Why of course. There isn’t any such hurry. . . . And I may not go,” she said slowly.

The dressmaker glanced sharply at the shadow in the corner. “You don’t seem to agree,” she said dryly.

“She’s had an invitation over to the Eben Braithwaite’s in Camden— You know he run for governor once?”

The dressmaker nodded. Her eyes narrowed to the dress. “Well, I’ll try to get it done by Wednesday— You don’t want to miss any good times.”

“All right,” said the girl. She held out her arms. The dressmaker drew off the dress with careful touch, and Isabel stepped out from the row of encircling pins.

“I don’t know that I shall go, but if I do I’d like to wear it. You’ve made it real pretty!”

“I think it looks good myself—made out of old so. It’s nice silk, and soft. I do’no’ but it hangs better’n the silks they make now. I’ll have it done, Bel, and you wear it. You’ll look real pretty in it!”

CHAPTER XX

THE Braithwaite house stood a little back from the street and a curved drive led to the porte cochere at the side. A concrete walk following the curve of the drive branched off to a large door facing the street.

Isabel, coming up the walk, half-paused. She glanced doubtfully at the house. Through the open door and windows came a sound of voices—laughing, talking—and the faint music of violins. She walked more slowly. She wanted to turn back. She had not thought there would be people.

She had not sent Miss Braithwaite word of her coming, because she wanted to buy a hat. She could not ask the Braithwaite's car to wait for her while she bought a hat! So she had come alone by train and stopped on the way from the station. . . . It was a charming hat. She knew the minute she saw it in the window that she would buy it.

The hat gave her courage to go the few steps further. Then in sight of the door she almost faced about and ran.

Two young men were coming down the steps. They wore silk hats and carried canes, and the canes and the hats stepped lightly. The smooth-shaven faces were set well ahead. They moved past her without a glance.

Her head lifted itself. A flush touched her face.

"Jove! That was a pretty girl!" murmured one of the hats. They were well down the walk swinging along. The words could not possibly reach to the girl mounting the steps.

She held her head high. There were dragons inside and dragons behind—in silk hats! She felt suddenly sick and a little faint. . . . But she would *not* turn back!

A maid standing in the hall motioned her toward the room beyond where the sound of battle raged thickest. . . . She pressed forward— A little mist obscured the foreground. Beyond it, looking toward her from the swaying heads she saw Ellen Braithwaite's face. She went forward to it and the face was moving toward her with inquiring gaze. Ellen Braithwaite's near-sighted eyes came near her and Ellen Braithwaite's mind searched swiftly— Now who was it—with eyes like stars, and the adorable waiting look. . . .?

The adorable face was smiling quietly at her. There was no sign of the thumping heart down underneath.

"I am afraid I have come at the wrong time—I'm Isabel Merton."

"Miss Merton! Of course! I am so glad to see you!" She took her hand with a look of relief and reached out to a passing young man.

"Oh Chauncey!" He turned with a look of boredom. Then he looked again— His face lighted and he sprang forward.

"Yes, Miss Braithwaite?" he said eagerly.

"I want you to meet Miss Merton," said Ellen Braithwaite.

He bowed deeply from the hips and recovered himself. The tips of his fingers remained inside the slits of his pockets.

"Awfully nice day!" he said deeply. Ellen Braithwaite touched his arm.

"I am going to get Miss Merton a cup of tea, Chauncey. Don't stir from here."

"Oh, I sha'n't stir!" The young man laughed happily. He glanced at the girl beside him. She was not regarding him. Her eyes were on the crowd. She held her head high.

"Top-notch!" thought the young man swiftly. It did not occur to him that she was frightened—that the poise of her head was that of a wild thing at bay. He saw only the pride and the eyes that made him think of spaces of wide sky at night.

"Stuffy crowd!" he murmured apologetically.

She nodded. She wondered when the cord about her throat would relax—and if she could speak if she tried to.

"Let's get out of it," he said. He motioned to the French window beside them open to the terrace. "It's cool out there."

She gave a fleeting longing glance to the window. . . . "But Miss Braithwaite," she said, "she expects to find us here." It was the quiet tone of acceptance and despair—but it might have been indifferent scorn.

"Squelched!" thought the young man swiftly.

He thrust the finger-tips a little deeper into the pocket slits.

“You are not from Camden?” he said with deference.

“Oh, no!”

“I thought not. I know every one here. We get pretty well used to each other, a place like this. Same faces every time.” He spoke as a man of the larger world to one belonging to that world.

Her throat contracted. She wanted to tell him she worked in Berwick’s Mill—had worked there ever since she was fourteen. . . . She wished he would go away and not stand staring at her, his head a little to one side—like a chickadee. . . . Yes, that was exactly what he was like—a chickadee and a smooth black cap! The smile touched her lip and curved it.

He recovered hope of the curve— “Nice thing they’re playing!” He motioned where the violins behind the palms were drawing soft strings.

“Fine to dance to!” he added.

“Yes?” She turned her head to listen. It was the first time the sound of the music had reached her ear. Her face lighted and she turned it to him—The glow in her eyes deepened.

“Isn’t it beautiful!” she breathed. He scored.

“Ever dance to it?”

“No.” They were silent, listening to the violins. She opened her lips, reluctant.

“I don’t know how.” He turned his face—

“What do you mean?”

"I don't know how," she repeated. "I've never learned to dance." He laughed.

"You don't expect me to believe that!" He looked at the light-swaying figure—the poised head and the mobile face touched by the music of the violins.

"Why, you *are* the dance!" he said, "all by yourself." He turned. Ellen Braithwaite had come up. She was shielding a cup of tea from the crowd.

"Here!" He took it from her with careful hand.

"You should have sent me!" he said reproachfully.

"I wanted you and Miss Merton to get acquainted."

"Yes? Well, we are— Aren't we!" He turned to the girl, holding out the cup to her.

"We've got so much acquainted she's been kidding me!" he said laughing.

"Oh, no," murmured Isabel.

"What did she say?" asked Ellen Braithwaite. She was amused and curious.

"Said she'd never danced! Didn't know how."

Ellen Braithwaite looked at her. The girl assented quietly.

"I've never learned," she said.

"But don't you want to?"

"Of course! Doesn't everyone want to?" It was a quick flash.

Ellen Braithwaite turned with a look of pleasure to the young man.

"Go and find Katie for me, Chauncey. Tell her we want the floor cleared for dancing. She knows

what to do!" She glanced at Isabel. Her face was glowing.

"I'm going to teach you myself," she said. "I'm so glad you told us. They will all like it—to dance. I didn't have the rugs taken up because it's a bother. It was just selfishness in me!"

She watched the two men who entered at the rear. They rolled the rugs with swift efficient turns and carried them off. She motioned one of them to her side.

"Bring in the victrola, Thomas—from the library," she directed.

"Yes, miss." The man moved away.

The crowd drew back to the edge of the room. Faces lighted up, wraps were tossed aside. Feet began to take the music of the violins.

Ellen Braithwaite went toward the palms and spoke to the players. The music ceased.

"We'll use the victrola," she said, returning to Isabel. "It is more even, and the men are tired. They've played all the afternoon." Her face had a light of quick interest. She hummed a little as they waited. . . . It appealed to her to teach this quiet frank girl to dance. She had not expected anything so entertaining from her day at home.

Dancing was a passion with Ellen Braithwaite, but it was a passion she did not often indulge in Camden. . . . Her hand rested on the girl's shoulder, her eyes scanned the room. One or two couples took the floor, they were moving to the music lightly.

Isabel's glance followed them.

"I can never do it," she murmured.

"Oh, yes, it's simple! Just swing to the music—and trust me!"

Isabel cast her a swift look. She would have liked to turn her cheek and brush the hand resting on her shoulder.

"I can trust you," she said. "That's easy!"

The hand tightened. An arm was about her waist firm and close. She felt herself swung—lifted and caught by the music and borne on.

"One-two-three, one-two-three!" The monotonous lulling voice was close to her ear. Her feet caught the lilt and swayed to it.

Her cheeks flushed. Her breath came quickly. The music drenched her and poured through her, and sped in swift-moving feet across the shining floor. . . . She and Ellen Braithwaite were one, moving through space swaying to the music. . . .

She came to herself sharply. They had stopped by the palms. Ellen Braithwaite was smiling at her with friendly eyes. Isabel's hand was pressed to her side and she breathed quickly. Ellen Braithwaite nodded laughingly.

"I knew you could dance!" she said. "It was fine!"

The girl looked at her shyly. She felt they shared a secret. She wanted to run away home with it, look at it, and keep it safe.

But the young man was pressing forward——

"I say, Miss Merton, you cheated a little, didn't

you?" He held out his hands. "I hope you'll give me one to make up?" She drew back.

"But I really can't! I don't know how!" He cast an amused glance at Ellen Braithwaite. She nodded to Isabel.

"Try it," she said.

"He'll be sorry!" returned the girl. She made a little wry face but she placed her hand obediently on his shoulder. He moved back with tripping efficient steps.

She followed haltingly.

After a minute they stopped. He bit his lip.

"We don't quite get it, do we," he said smoothly. "Now—we will try once more!"

They came to a disastrous pause by the wall. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow. Isabel was looking at him with amused vexed glance. Her face wore a deep flush.

"I told you I couldn't!" she said in a low tense voice. She wanted to go home. She wanted to sink through the floor where every one else was swaying happily and lightly. The thought of Ellen Braithwaite and those wonderful minutes while they floated in space mocked her. She looked at the man beside her with rebellious eyes. He replaced the handkerchief.

"I'm going to teach you," he said firmly. He pushed up his cuffs. "Come into the next room!"

They found a clear space in the library. The sound of the victrola reached them faintly. He supplemented it with light humming notes and

counted sternly. He taught her the steps and took them apart and put them together in endless repetition. She caught the rhythm at last and swung to it in confidence.

"Come on!" he said exultingly. "That's fine!" They returned to the dancers, and he guided her into the stream, holding her with firm imperious hand. They came to a halt by Ellen Braithwaite, breathless.

She drew the girl to her. "Splendid, Chauncey!" she said approvingly. "Miss Merton must rest now. Run along and dance with some one else."

"I'd as soon stay here," he replied.

"Run along," she said severely.

"We'll try it again?" He withdrew with a deep bow. They watched him mingle in the dance. He was guiding a girl with wide red girdle. She danced with happy clicking steps. They moved as one.

Ellen Braithwaite watched them, smiling. She stood with her hand on the girl's shoulder. She looked at her.

"Tired?" she asked. Isabel shook her head. She lifted her face. Her lip was trembling. The hand on her shoulder tightened a little.

"You are a dear!" said Ellen Braithwaite under her breath. "And your dress is adorable! You don't mind my saying it?" She moved back a little, looking and nodding— "It suits you to perfection!" Her eyes dwelt on the girl.

And swiftly across Isabel's vision passed a dull tired face and her mother's voice. . . . "It'll look real pretty when it's dyed."

"I ought to go home!" she said passionately.

"No—not yet!" The hand rested on her shoulder. "I want to introduce some one to you. . . . And by and by you and I will dance again!"

She brought up a young man with very stiff upright hair. Isabel found he danced with a step and a rhythm very different from Chauncey's. But she was more at ease now. She discovered she must yield quickly—think only of her partner and his sense of the rhythm. . . . She saw suddenly John Senior's rugged face. She heard his gruff dictating voice—That was the way! Just as you did with John Senior! You got his pace and swung to it. . . . She was almost happy, dipping and bobbing to the eccentric young man's idea of the music!

"You're great," he said admiringly. "Ever dance it before?"

"No." Her face dimpled.

He brought her to rest with a final flourish and a deep bow.

"We'll try that again some time!" He was breathing fast.

"Yes," said Isabel. She had emerged from her chrysalis. . . . She knew they were wings. She folded them serenely on her back. . . . They opened and closed a little softly. By and by she would fly away with them.

The faces pressed about her. They liked her! She liked them. . . . She did not hear the whispered word passed through the room that the girl in the blue dress had never danced before. She did not

know she was helped at every turn, or that the radiance in her was a centre of light in the room.

She only knew that her heart overflowed with dancing.

Ellen Braithwaite watched it all with careful eyes—a word here, a touch there. She guided things to her liking jealously. The child must not be made self-conscious. Only let her dance like that a little while. . . . She claimed her again, and they danced with a slow swaying movement that filled the girl with happiness and love. . . . She felt she could lay down her life for Ellen Braithwaite. It would be easy to die for her! If there were only something she could do to make her understand. She looked up shyly as they came to rest for a moment. Ellen Braithwaite had not relaxed her hold. They stood close, looking in each other's eyes.

And suddenly across Isabel's vision swept the rain-drenched windows and a woman's white face looking down at her hungrily. . . . Then the gay little rain-coat wrapped about her. . . .

"Now one more—" said Ellen Braithwaite's voice close to her. "Then I must let you go!" They swung into the movement, drifting on. . . .

The others drew back and cleared a space to watch them. There was something almost professional in the two figures moving with easy precision and rhythm.

Ellen Braithwaite had studied with the masters of dancing in every country. There was no unconsciousness in the watchful skill that guided the dance

and wove its moving pattern of advance and retreat and quick drifting embrace. . . . They moved apart and came together by a spell, stately or laughing or full of gentle languor as she willed.

And the crowd of dancers looked on and applauded. A witchery was in the air.

XXI

JOHN JR. in the doorway overlooked the crowd. He gazed almost hostilely at the two figures moving in slow rhythm. . . . He was annoyed to find the crowd here to-day and Ellen Braithwaite dancing. . . . He wanted to see her alone. There were all sorts of things he wanted to say to her. He had been thinking them over, looking forward to seeing her—ever since the day he brought home the scarf.

His gaze dwelt moodily on the two figures moving in the centre of the room. . . . The music was nearing the end. It deepened and swung more swiftly. He was caught up by it. He seemed to be dancing with them. Everyone was dancing. . . .

The crowd swayed a little. They were laughing and applauding. He pressed forward with them—

And Isabel turned and smiled—

He stared. He thrust back the lock of hair.

Ellen Braithwaite held out her hand— “You are just in time,” she said smilingly, “for one dance with Miss Merton.”

He looked from one to the other quickly.

They were still holding hands and swaying together subtly. The music had begun again. The dancers were taking the floor.

And John Junior saw that they were both beautiful and desirable . . . so beautiful he could not take

his eyes from either of them. He wanted to dance with them both!

"I don't understand it!" he faltered.

"Nobody does!" laughed Ellen Braithwaite. "We are bewitched!" She placed the girl's hand in his——

"Just once around," she said. "There is not much time." She left them with a word.

"I did not know you could dance," said John Junior stiffly.

"I can't. I am Cinderella. . . . I ought to go home."

He seized her firmly— "Not till we've had our dance." All the freshness of the spring went drifting down the room with them. . . .

"We will never stop!" He was looking down at her.

"I must go! I shall miss my train!"

"I shall take you home myself!" He was abrupt and masterful——

"Oh, no! Please!" She broke from him hurriedly. He moved behind her. Ellen Braithwaite came to them.

"What is it?"

"I must go!" said Isabel. "I shall miss my train."

"But I am going to drive you over," said Ellen. "I am looking forward to it. I need the air. Wait till they go—there's a dear!" She pressed her back gently, and the girl yielded with a happy sigh. Ellen looked at her.

"You are tired!" she said. "Don't dance any more. They will be going now."

She moved away, but a touch on her arm held her. She looked up. Her father stood there.

"Introduce me to your little friend, Nell." He nodded carelessly. "I saw her dancing with Berwick. Mighty pretty dancer!" He looked at the girl approvingly. She was sitting, watching the crowd with absorbed face. She turned the face to them— There was almost dismay in the quick glance of withdrawal.

Why, it's—the . . . the little girl in the office," said Braithwaite with a smile. He held out his hand.

"I am glad to see you here," he said courteously. "I didn't know you!"

"I am just going," said Isabel, breathless. Her dreams were tumbling about her, shrieking at her, mocking her.

"Yes." Ellen Braithwaite tucked her arm into the girl's. "Yes, we're off, father. I'm going to drive her home." She turned away.

"Have her stay to dinner." Braithwaite followed them.

"Why not?" Ellen Braithwaite looked at Isabel inquiringly. "We'd love to have you!"

But the girl shook her head in a kind of frantic haste it seemed.

"Oh— I can't— I can't! I must go home— right off!"

"Yes, child! We are going, right now!" said Ellen Braithwaite. She laughed quietly.

In the car she leaned back with a quick sigh.

"We had a nice time, didn't we?"

"I can't tell you!" said the girl. The tone was almost fierce in its repression.

"And yet you were in such a hurry to get away!" Ellen Braithwaite smiled at her. "You wouldn't have stayed to dinner for worlds!"

"No— But that was just it. . . . I'd had so much happiness I couldn't stand another bit! I felt as if I should burst if anything more that was lovely happened to me!" She knew the words were true and she did not search below them.

Ellen Braithwaite reached a hand to hers lying in her lap and covered it quietly.

"You must come again! You must come often."

Her eyes strayed over the slight figure sitting erect—the eager face and lifted head . . . and her glance took in slowly the details of the girl's dress and hat. There was something quaint and odd about them—

"Your gown is charming!" she said, "and the color is perfect for your hair and eyes. How did you manage it?"

The girl cast a swift merry glance—"My mother dyed it," she said.

"No!"

Isabel nodded. "Dipped it three times to get it right." She laughed happily.

The woman frowned. She bent forward and touched it with thoughtful hand—

"I wish I had one like it—just that shade— You don't suppose she would dye it for me, do you?"

"Oh—no!" said Isabel in quick dismay. "You mustn't!"

The woman's hand withdrew a little.

"You don't want me to have it?"

"Not like this," said Isabel miserably. "Don't you know—!" She hesitated and bit her lip.

The woman's eyes smiled a little. "Well?"

Isabel's glance lifted quickly— "You ought to have something deep—that glows!— Fire in it!" She said it swiftly.

"Pretty!" murmured the woman.

"And straight close lines," went on the girl. Her eyes glowed to it. She leaned forward, looking up at the face that laughed and regarded her with gentle irony.

"Go on," murmured Ellen Braithwaite.

"And your hair done up high and close—oh, *very* severe! I could do it for you! And everything simple, you know—simple lines—and not a furbelow anywhere. Not these—or these!" She touched the floating ends with respectful disdaining finger and Ellen Braithwaite laughed out happily.

"You child!" she said.

"I would love to," responded Isabel. "I've wanted to ever since I saw you in the office."

"Oh—in the office!" mused Ellen Braithwaite. Her eyes went back to it. "How long ago it seems!" She sighed and moved a little restively.

"Not so very long," said Isabel.

"No—but it seems long— Tell me!" She laid her hand on the girl's again. "Would you be willing to come to us, I wonder?"

"Come—to?" Isabel's lips parted.

"My father wants a stenographer—I told him I would ask you." The words hurried a little, but they seemed curiously reluctant.

"He would pay you whatever you are getting now—and more."

Isabel's eyes were thoughtful.

"I couldn't do it— The trains don't run right." She spoke with relief. The trains ended it.

"But you would live with us, of course!"

"Live with you!" The wonder of it seemed to play about her for a moment. It left her breathless.

She shook her head slowly. "No, I couldn't do that. I couldn't go away from home."

"Why not?"

The girl's eyes grew dark. She seemed gazing at something beyond them—beyond the trees that slipped by the swift-moving car on either side.

"I don't know why," she said slowly. "If I went to you like that I should change—I should be different."

The woman's hand on hers tightened. "It should not hurt you," she said swiftly. "No one should hurt you!" The words were quick.

Isabel turned a quiet smile.

"I am different *now*—just a few hours—and I am different. I feel as if myself was waiting for me there at home." She nodded her head. "Waiting for me to put it on when I come home and take off this dress." Her face grew wistful.

"I've had a heavenly time!" she sighed.

The woman laughed out. She drew her to her and

kissed her. . . . And swiftly Isabel saw a white face and the drenching storm on the hill.

“Child!” said Ellen Braithwaite. “You shall stay just as you are! I will tell my father he can’t have you. . . . But you must come to us often.”

“I do not have much time, you know,” said the girl soberly. “I work.”

“We will make time for you. . . . I can’t lose you, child! Don’t you know you have brought the spring to me!”

The car slid to a quiet stop. Ellen Braithwaite leaned forward and peered out toward the small house.

“Good-by,” she said. “I know now where you live. I shall come for you. Good-by!”

XXII

SHE opened the door, breathless, and stepped in. Her mother looked up——

“Why where have you been, Bel? I’ve worried about you. The train’s in over an hour ago!”

“I didn’t come by train. Miss Braithwaite brought me——”

Jimmie was looking at her admiringly. He darted to the window.

“In her car! Gee——!” He thrust his head under the shade. He emerged chagrined.

“Gone!” he said. She smiled.

“Of course, Jimmie!— It goes like the wind!”

She sat down with her arms stretched on the table before her. She was gazing straight ahead with unseeing eyes.

Her mother looked at her. She surveyed the new dress with proud critical eyes. “Did you have a good time?”

The girl’s head dropped to her arms. Her shoulders moved—a long shivering sob—and another and another—shaking her steadily.

“What’s the matter?” demanded the woman. “What’s happened to you, Bel?”

The girl lifted her face—tears running helplessly down.

“I’m so happy!” she sobbed. She blew her nose fiercely.

"Well, of all the foolishness!" commented the mother. "Crying!"

Isabel nodded. "I couldn't help it! I just spilled over!" She laughed and dried her eyes in quick impatient dabs. The boy hovered near. He seemed drawn by invisible force. He reached a shy hand to her sleeve.

"You look awful nice, Sis!" he said gruffly. She cast him a look.

"Oh, Jimmie—it was wonderful!" she breathed.

"Eats?" he inquired. She shook her head.

"No—not much. Just drinks, I guess."

"What!" Her mother's voice was sharp.

"I mean I had a cup of tea— And then we danced."

"*You* can't dance!" said her mother.

"But I did. Anybody can dance. It's just being alive—and happy! That's all dancing is." She leaned to her mother.

"*You* could dance," she said swiftly.

"I don't want to dance!" Althea Merton's voice was austere. She shut her mouth in a firm line. "And I don't know as I want you should dance, either."

"Could *I* dance, Sis?" The boy's voice was ironic and cheerful—a poser.

"Of course you could, Jimmie!"

"Come on!" She held out her hands——

"Aw—I didn't mean it!" He drew back. "Just joking!"

"But you can——!"

He looked down at his big clumsy shoes. "Not in those things," he muttered.

"Take them off!" Her lips were smiling. Her feet danced a little——

He unlaced the shoes and slipped them off and stood up.

"Not in your stocking feet!" commanded his mother sternly.

"Take them off, Jimmie. Go ahead—barefoot!—Come on, now!" She grasped him firmly and moved back and forth, swaying him gently and humming a little tune that haunted her.

The boy stood very straight and careful, a look of absorption in his face as if he were submitting to some uncanny and mystic rite.

"Let yourself go, Jimmie!" she commanded. They moved faster.

The boy looked up with half-serious laughing disbelief struggling in his face.

"I kind o' feel it coming!" he said.

"You can do it all right. Now——"

She stopped short.

The door had opened.

They remained poised, hands upraised, toes pointing downward—caught in the rhythmic movement.

The man surveyed them cynically.

"What's the nonsense!" he demanded.

The figures drew apart.

"What were you doing that way?" he said gruffly.

"Bel's been to a kind of tea," said his wife. "She's on her high horse, I guess."

"Humph! High heels, more likely!" He came over and pointed to the light thin-soled shoes with a look of scorn.

"Is that any kind of a thing to wear on a sensible foot?"

She looked down and put out the trim shoe and gazed at it critically. The shoes were new. She had bought them this afternoon in Camden. They made her feet dance a little—even before she heard the music of the violins—

"Don't you like them?" she asked doubtfully.

"Like them? Look at those heels!"

She turned the heel doubtfully, gazing at the slender arched line of her instep. . . .

"Everybody wears them," she said.

"I don't!" he retorted.

"Oh—father, I didn't mean you!" she bubbled over.

He scowled, and picked up the boy's broad clumsy shoe with its trailing lace and the gaping tongue hanging out.

"There's a heel for you—sensible heel!" He threw it down. "Why can't you wear something that looks like the normal human foot?"

She gazed at him perplexed.

He put out his own foot and pointed down to it sternly.

"Like that," he said. He planted it more firmly. It was broad and square-toed and determined—the normal human foot. They all gazed at it respectfully.

The boy working his toes back and forth against the carpet thrust a bare foot beside the broad square-toed leather sole——

“Or like that,” he said laughing.

His father turned and glared at him.

“You keep still,” he said. “I’m doing this.”

“Oh—all right, dad!” The boy drew back on light feet. He was smiling at his sister. He wanted to defend her. . . . She looked so pretty standing there in her new dress and hat looking down at the absurd little high-heeled shoes. Her face was thoughtful.

“They are ridiculous, aren’t they?” She turned the sole a little and said it softly, “but they don’t feel ridiculous. They just make you happy and light—and wanting everybody to have a good time!” She gazed at them wistfully.

“You don’t have to be up on stilts to be happy, do you! . . . What would you think of me—if you saw me going around in things like that?” The girl looked at the square determined foot. She laughed out clearly and irrepressibly. The boy gave a high thin whoop. His father cast a warning eye——

“Going down the street,” he continued sternly, “mincing along! You’d say I was a fool!”

“You’d *look* like one, dad, wouldn’t you!” The boy came over chuckling. He looked from the solid heavy foot to the dainty high-heeled one that seemed alive with lightness, eager to be off and fly from the earth.

“Sis is different, isn’t she?” His glance followed

the delicate slender lines of the girl's figure up to her lifted head and the pretty new hat——

"She ain't like us, dad!" he said softly. "Seems 's if she's different somehow. Lighter and—and different." He groped for it in his boy's soul, and his eyes dwelt on his sister with a little dawning look.

"She's a peach!" he said under his breath.

"You go to bed," said his father.

"All right." He went over to the table and picked up his books, slamming the covers together. His eye caught an open page. It absorbed him.

He leaned over chuckling— "All the animals of different countries—dozens of them." He giggled.

His father came over to him. He was fond of the boy— Something of his own youth bubbled up to him now and then in Jim's face and made him a little homesick.

"What you got there?" he demanded gruffly.

The boy pointed.

"I was just looking at 'em—all the different animals—and their legs and feet. . . . You see that one—'antelope.' Kind o' thin and high— And this old 'hippopotamus' lumbering along. They'd look kind o' funny with changed legs, wouldn't they!" He gurgled over it happily, and a smile touched the father's grim face.

"You get along to bed," he said.

XXIII

THE mother followed the boy into the kitchen. They heard her moving about, pouring out water for the dishes, filling the tea-kettle. Isabel came out.

"I'll help wipe," she said.

Her mother was setting the kettle on the stove. She glanced over her shoulder.

"You going to change your dress?" she asked a little anxiously.

"Why, no, I guess not. I sha'n't hurt it."

"You'd better have this apron, then." She brought a large gingham apron from a drawer and pinned it around her, smoothing the folds of the silk under it with gentle strokes. "It looks real nice on you," she said.

"Yes, I had such a beautiful time!"

"I know. . . . Your father didn't mean anything. It's just his way. He'll get over it if you don't pester him." She glanced quickly at the girl.

The eyes following the dish-towel wore an absent look—a little smile parted her lips. She had not heard the words. . . . Her feet were dancing, and her hands bore the dishes back and forth with a light swaying movement. The mother sighed.

"I'm glad you had a good time." She glanced at the dress. "'Most seems as if you ought to change it, though. It will have to do you for best for a long time."

"I don't want to change it. It makes me feel so happy. I feel as if it would kill something in me if I took it off!" Her mother gave her a quick scared look.

"You hadn't ought to talk like that! Clothes can't do anything to you!"

"Can't they, mother?" The girl's eyes challenged it—seeking, wistful—trying to believe it must be so.

"Then why do I feel this way?" she demanded slowly.

"Well, of course, anybody likes to be dressed up once in a while. . . . But you spoke 'most as if they were alive—as if they dould *do* things to you. Clothes ain't alive!" She poured out a dipperful of water.

The girl's eyes followed the rising steam. She sighed a little. She glanced at her mother's worn shoulders and faded black waist.

"I wish *you* had a new dress, mother!"

"Me! I don't need a dress. I don't go out anywheres."

"But perhaps you would if you had a dress. Perhaps the dress would make you go—make you feel like going?"

Her face lighted. "That's what I mean! They *can* make you do things!" Her mother's face responded dully with a look of fondness—

"Well, I don't want to do things—not if you're happy. That's all I want, not to have anything bad happen, and to have you children happy—and good. . . . That's enough for me—now."

But when the girl went back to the sitting-room she heard her mother singing—an old quaint hymn. She sang it low, the snatches breaking off and beginning fitfully. . . . She had not heard her mother sing since she was a little girl.

She glanced at her father. He was absorbed in his paper. His feet were thrust out before him in slippers—the normal human foot. She smiled at it as she passed him and found the book she was reading.

Her father rustled the paper. He threw it aside.

“Where’d you get that dress you’ve got on?”

“This? This is mother’s wedding-dress.” She waited intently. It seemed to her she hardly breathed.

He made no reply.

“It did not cost anything—not anything much!” She waited again.

She thought of the back room at the store. . . . She loved her mother with a kind of fierce devotion. It seemed to her she could not bear to have her old and worn.

“I’m getting more pay,” she said. He started——

“You are?— How’d that happen?”

“I asked for it.” There was a little pride in the words.

“Humph! . . . I’d like to ask for it and get it—easy as that!”

“Why don’t you?”

“Why don’t I!”

“Yes. . . . You’re your own boss, aren’t you?”

The keen words flicked him.

He sat up.

“Do you suppose anybody’ll buy anything in this God-forsaken hole? They wouldn’t buy ten-cents worth—not if John Wanamaker was to open a store right on Main Street! They wouldn’t buy anything if you’d give it to ’em.”

“I don’t believe you’ve got anything they want,” she said thoughtfully.

“Anything they want! . . . A lot of girls came giggling in to-day—a lot of your mill crowd—What do you suppose they wanted?”

“What did they?” She leaned forward.

“Hairpins!” He said it scornfully. Althea Merton stood in the doorway. She came in slowly.

“You keep hairpins, don’t you, Aaron? You used to.” She spread her sewing on her lap and took up her thimble.

“I keep *hair-pins*—the sensible kind, straight—the kind I’ve always kept.”

“Like that?” She drew out one from her thin hair and held it toward him. He glanced contemptuously.

“Yes. That’s the kind I keep.” She replaced it with careful fingers.

“I thought you had some,” she said. “You used to.”

“What *did* they want, father?” The girl’s voice laughed a little.

“I don’t know. Some kind of a crinkled-up thing!”

"Invisible——?"

"Yes, I guess so. Humph!— Invisible!" He scorned it.

She laughed happily. "They're doing their hair a new way!" she said. Her eyes seemed looking at something unseen. . . . The look grew wistful. She glanced at her mother's bent head—the dull gray hair—the "same way she'd always done it," with the straight black pins. She leaned forward——

"I wish you would get some invisible ones, father."

"What?"

She nodded. Then she smiled. Then she laughed. The hairpins spun before her. They danced a little.

"Put in a good big stock," she said. "Make it a rush order. I'll tell the girls to wait."

He turned in his chair. He drew in his slippereed feet and looked at her.

"You think I'll get rich on hairpins, I suppose! I tell you the minute I got loaded up with hairpins, they'd want—shoe-strings!" He glared at her. "You try running a store in this town a while!"

"I'd like to!"

"Well, I'd like to have you! . . . If my father hadn't had a store here I might amount to something. I'd have gone away. I wouldn't have got married, maybe." He gave a grim look. He rustled his paper a little. Althea Merton stirred. She bit off a length of thread and squinted at her needle.

The girl laughed. "I should have been sorry about that," she said swiftly.

He gave her a flicking smile.

"Didn't grandpa do a good business?" she asked.

"Good enough."

"He left money," she persisted.

"Some." He drew in his feet further.

"Then why can't we make it?"

Her mother looked up, the little anxious line between her eyes.

"Times have changed, Bel," she said gently.

"Your father has always tried——"

"I'm not blaming father. I only want to know what's happened."

"Well——?" The man let the offense go, with masculine tolerance. He accepted the abstract question. There was something in the girl he had never found in his wife—a kind of fairness, impersonal and quiet, a willingness to look at things squarely. . . . But it was the fairness that hurt. It had built up a wall between them. He knew she judged him impartially. The fact that he was her father and ought to be loved and looked up to never seemed to come between Bel and the things she thought people ought to do.

She was hard on people—even when they tried. He stirred a little.

"Well— In *my* father's day everybody bought what they wanted right here——"

"They might now," she said quickly. He did not heed it.

"And there was plenty of money in town."

"More than there is now?"

He stared at her slowly.

"Well, no. I don't suppose there was, likely. There's a good lot of money made in Hanover now." She nodded.

"What do they do with it?"

"They put it in the bank," said her mother anxiously. "I guess everybody's got a bank-book except us." She sat looking at it. The man turned.

"That's not *my* fault!"

"No, no, Aaron! I didn't say so!" She took up her sewing hastily.

"They earn the money and then they put it in the bank—over in Camden," said Bel thoughtfully.

"Well, what of that?" said her father. His face was turned sharply.

"Nothing. I was only thinking how happy they all seemed this afternoon—as if they had enough to eat."

"Enough to eat?" murmured her mother in dismay. "I should hope so."

Isabel laughed. "Enough for their minds to eat, I mean—all sorts of beautiful things. . . . I *wish* you could have seen them!" Her face glowed with it. She leaned forward looking at it happily. The little electric forces seemed playing about her and leaping in the room. . . .

"I don't know what you're talking about!" said her father gruffly. He stirred uneasily. "And I guess you don't!"

She put her hands over her eyes—shutting it out.

"No, I don't!" she said. "Something seemed to come! I'm going to bed."

“Good-night!” Their eyes followed her from the room. They did not look at each other when she was gone.

The man picked up his paper. The mother’s head bent lower over the coat she was mending.

“What do you suppose she meant, Aaron?”

“I don’t know. Some kind of dum foolishness. She’s always going on about something!” He went on reading the paper to himself.

XXIV

THEY gathered in the rest-room chattering and fluttering, squealing like magpies. John Junior passing the closed door of the rest-room halted and looked at it in amazement.

He glanced out of the hall window—down at the fence. A few youths wandered disconsolately alone. Glorious sunshine, spring warmth in the air— And not a girl down there by the fence! John Junior listened again to the babble of voices behind the closed door.

A smile of satisfaction touched his face. . . . They were beginning to use the rest-room, to like it, and feel at home there! The smile deepened to a sense of achievement. His shoulders straightened. He wished his father were here. John smiled serenely. Father was getting old. . . . It takes time to bring reforms to pass! He heard the laughter again. It touched some quick spring of joy in him!

He wondered whether he could make a poem of it— But the idea seemed to evade rhymes. . . . Only it made him strangely happy to hear the girls laughing like that in the rest-room. They really felt at home there!

The door opened and a half-dozen of them fluttered out. They cast respectful glances at him as they passed. He bowed pleasantly. . . . There was

something in the glances—brightness, bubbling up, a kind of shining joy that made him glad.

John Junior knew that the first and most necessary equipment of a modern factory is a force of happy contented employees.

His heart leaped. His eyes followed them with delight.

They moved together in a kind of swaying unison down the long corridor, and the light falling on their moving heads made a picture of it. He noted how graceful they were—moving together that way!

They turned the corner to the stairs and descended and whoops of repressed laughter came back. He smiled tolerantly. Giggles and little shrieks. He wished again that John Senior could see and hear. The factory was beginning to wake up and sound the modern note! He had seen nothing in Lord Leverhulme's factory as fine as that group of girls just now going down the corridor in the light. . . . A little enthusiasm for the business woke up in John Junior.

And across it came a slow vision. . . .

He stared at it.

What made him see Isabel Merton now—and like that! He had not been thinking of her. . . . His fingers groped for a pencil.

There was a kind of beauty spreading and growing in him and outside of him. It seemed to surround him . . . and it all centred in the quiet figure of a girl with a little smile on her lips, copying his notes. . . .

He wondered suddenly where Isabel was? He had not seen her since the tea at Ellen Braithwaite's. . . . He recalled gratefully that she always took her luncheon in the office alone.

He went down the hall.

A burst of laughter came from the rest-room and followed him. The door had opened. Another group of girls came out. They were trouping out—more girls—. . . . He did not note the light on their shining heads— Every head done in a marvelous new way. He cared nothing for their happiness as model employees.

He wanted to see Isabel!

He felt suddenly that he must see her this minute.

Was she really as beautiful as the vision he had seen! . . .

He opened the door of the office. It was vacant.

Only on the table Isabel's machine waited for her.

John smiled.

Isabel's waiting machine seemed to fill the whole room with a kind of waiting light. . . . The closed door of his father's office caught his eye and a sense of responsibility descended on him. His father had said carelessly as he swung on to the train a week ago—

“Bel looks after the mail and Brackett will keep an eye on things down below. But if anything happens, your name is John Berwick, you know.”

John had assented with a laugh. He was watching the wreathing clouds from the engine—a woman's veil swept past him—faces jostled. . . . It was like

the rhythm of a poem. His father called out from the platform of the car—a wind-blown word and gesture—a clutch at his hat. . . . The gray-repeating windows moved past. His father's hand waved dimly within—a blur of flickering fingers and the train passed him. It was gone—except what remained within John Junior clamoring. To the crowd on the platform perhaps the going train was only an assemblage of boxes on wheels moving smoothly along the rails. To John it was a wrenching experience.

He had turned blindly toward the car waiting by the platform.

“All right, Sturgis!” He sprang in. And all the way back to the mill the rhythmic urge of faces and wheels and smoke and the clanking roar of the train pursued him. He had never seen a train depart before—he had only seen wood and steel moving away on wheels. . . . There were things outside and things within—and things moving—always moving together—and mysterious changing and never-ceasing movement! He caught sight of it dimly and lost it. The rhythm of the train swept in.

He could not make a poem of it. He had a gloomy sense that it was too big for him—and it wasn't poetry! . . . It seemed to have written itself there on the platform, and whirled away in the smoke of the receding train— A poem like that would have to write itself. It was not poetry!

But it tantalized him—like a breath of ozone from an opened door that closed again swiftly.

He had fretted with it for a while and dropped it.

Now his father's closed door recalled it to him and recalled the vague sense of responsibility for the mill his father had tossed to him as the train pulled out.

He would take a run through and see how things were going.

He cast another look about the quiet, waiting room and pulled his necktie and straightened his shoulders.

He would go through now while the men were out and again later. He might as well get to know what they were doing. His "name was Berwick." Some day he would have to take the load on his shoulders. He might as well get used to it.

He moved down the hall with determined step and through into the big room. Machines stretched away, row on row, with silent folded fingers. . . . But even in their silence they seemed to hum with power as he stood looking. The room was filled with dazzling light—and the light too seemed to hum a little. Two workmen by a window turned to stare at him curiously as he passed through to the opposite door. They did not often see John Junior in this room.

The whistle blew and he quickened his pace. He descended to the engine-room. The engineer moving past with an oil-can and thick black rag nodded to him cordially. The wheels were making slow revolutions—the shining greasy thrust of the rods was beginning to gather speed. He stood with his hands in

his pockets, whistling a little, watching the waiting monster. . . . This was what did the business—all those silent machines up there, humming deep within themselves. . . . This was it—this great monster of power—the intake of its laboring breath—the thrust and purr of it!

He shrugged his shoulders, watching it. Thoughts like that were foolish—flimsy poetry. This engine moving so silently was greater than poetry—it drew him—sucked him up, filled him with a roaring fire blast of desire. . . .

“Hie, there—!” A heavy hand descended on his shoulder.

He turned, blinking.

“You don’t want to get too near those rods!” said Brackett. He removed his grimy hand from the shoulder and shifted the oil-can. John moved back a step. The man was watching him curiously.

“You have to look out for machines,” he said dryly. John turned his face a little. It was illuminated. A light was shining through it from some deep place.

“It is—a wonderful thing!” He moved a hand toward the soft-purring engine.

The man nodded. “The best there is!”

They stood in silence watching the easy sweep and thrust of the rods.

“I’ll say this for your father,” said the man. “He don’t scrimp on machines. The best is none too good for him—and when they’re done we scrap ’em.”

“Scrap—a thing like that—scrap that power!”

The man turned a quiet look to him.

"I reckon John Berwick, nor any man, doesn't scrap power," he said. "Power's something you can't lay your hand on so easy as that. It's something kind of alive. You set a trap for it with a first class engine—and the best is none too good for it. . . ."

John turned a quick face. His lip quivered sensitively.

"That is wonderful!" he said.

"Yes, sir, it is! I've never seen through it myself—long as I've been handling engines, taking care of 'em, tinkering 'em up when they go wrong and throwing 'em out when they're done for—I always keep thinking to myself, way in back, there's something I don't lay my finger on from start to finish."

"And yet if it wasn't for the engine—we'd never get as near to it as we do!" said John.

The man looked at him a minute and as if a signal passed between them they stood quiet.

"That's right, too," he said. He moved on with his oil-can and rag.

John Junior went slowly back through the rooms. The machines were whirring now out loud—a deep-moving purring breath. And silent heads bent to them or drew back with intent look, watching them, and hands reached out. . . . John's heart quivered. A kind of worship rose in him. And then in a flash a vision swept across it—Isabel with her quiet head bent over her note-book and the little smile on her lip writing down his poems.

He hurried to his room. He wanted to be with familiar things. All this strangeness of life—and the mill and Isabel—must be faced of course. . . . Suppose it meant the end of his poems! He heard the engineer's quiet droll voice—

“And when they're done for, we scrap 'em.”

He opened the door of his room and stepped in. He stood a moment his hand on the knob, looking.

The knob relaxed slowly. The familiar things seemed strange. There was a new look to the room. . . .

The chenille curtains were dusty and fusty and close and the couch was a soft clumsy terra-cotta lump, and the lamp-shade a flimsy horror. He walked over to it and lifted it and gazed down at the curved bulb beneath it. Of course he could not stand the full glare of light. But there were other things! He tossed the shade behind him. It rolled a little on the floor and lay tilted to one side. The yellow fringe drooped. . . . He stepped quickly to the window and pulled at the chenille curtains. A cloud of dust descended on him, but he turned his head aside and pulled harder till they came draping about his ears. He gathered them in his arms and stooped to the couch-cover and drew it off and kicked the lamp-shade ahead of him to the closet door. He bundled them all in and shut the door firmly and turned back—

His glance swept the walls— With the help of a window-pole he dislodged picture-hooks one by one—only shrugging his shoulders a little when the wires

descended on him. The pictures followed the curtains to the closet. His glance swept the room again with slow smile. He went to the alcove and seized the typewriter and moved it over by his desk where the light from the window fell full on it. Then he drew a long breath and looked about him dazed——

Well, that was done!

And how friendly the room looked—how bare and clean!

XXV

THE next day John Senior returned. His coming was like the sweep of a cool breeze on a sultry day—Everyone was relieved, but a little upset by the swift rush of air through the place.

He called Isabel to the inner office. He was in the best of spirits.

“Everything’s coming on,” he confided to her as she came in. “I got there just in the nick of time. But I’ll have to take in sail for a while—the way I’m fixed— Sail pretty close to the wind for a spell.” He considered a minute.

“Well, take this first—to Wolcott and Ames.” The dictation began.

He paused now and then to go over the things he dictated. “I’m grudging every penny, you see. It means dollars—hundreds of dollars later on for me! You wouldn’t believe the way things are fixed out there— Nobody’d believe that hadn’t seen— Money just bubbling up out of the ground!” It was a relief to talk to Isabel. He liked to play a lone hand—always had. But it had been bottled up in him all the way home in the train till he wanted to shout and throw things. . . . There was no one he could trust like Isabel—not even John Junior.

“Just ready to boil up anywhere,” he went on.

"You stick in the fork and up it comes! Never saw anything like it!"

She was looking at him reflectively.

"And it all belongs to you?"

"I've signed the option. Yep." He grinned.

Her reflective look still held it. "I should think anything like that ought to belong to everybody," she said impartially.

"Well, it don't!—not if I've got my fork in first!—Here take this down—to Simons—John H. Simons," and the dictation went on again.

His fingers drummed on the arm of his chair.

"Belong to everybody! Umph!" he said. "You're a Bolshevik, Bel!"

She smiled. "Shall I take that down?"

"A regular Bolshevik!" said John Senior sternly. "Money belongs to the man that gets his hand on it and keeps it there! I'd like to have mine on a little more just this present minute. . . . I might cut down your wages—save a dollar or two that way!" he chuckled. He twinkled at her shrewdly.

John Senior was in a rare good humor.

She shook her head.

"I have use for my money too—important use."

"What you doing with it?" he asked tolerantly.

"Oh—little things. . . . I don't quite know—" she was gazing at something beyond John Senior's head, and her face glowed a little. He looked behind him instinctively and quickly. Isabel's eyes seemed little mirrors of something coming—

"I'll tell you what I *will* do, Bel! You let me take

that extra money of yours and I'll put it into this thing right now!" He tapped it with his finger.

She looked at the finger. "So the money would bubble up for me?" she asked. He nodded shrewdly.

She shook her head. "I don't want it."

"You don't *want* it? What *do* you want?"

"Why, I want—I want to live, I guess!" She laughed out. "Just that!" She nodded. "I want to live!" There was a dancing light in her eyes and behind it a deep still glow. John Senior regarded it a minute.

"Humph!" he said. "You take down this," and the dictation went swiftly on. . . . "There, that's the last. Now hustle! We've got to move lively the next few weeks."

When the door had closed behind her he glanced at it. . . . He turned to his desk and fussed at his papers. He looked again at the door——

"Humph!" he said. He shook his head.

But if John Senior failed to understand her it was not strange.

Isabel did not understand herself.

She had wakened in the morning with them in her mind—those crinkly invisible hairpins.

She lay and stared at them and at the ceiling. She sprang up. There should be plenty of hairpins and they should buy them in Hanover—at Aaron Merton's store! . . . The store had always kept notions, "Drugs and Notions"—as long as she could remember. There was no reason it should not do it now. She hurried down to breakfast full of

curious eagerness and a little constrained. But her father was not there—he was still in bed. She left the house without seeing him.

All the way to the mill they pursued her—the crinkly invisible pins—they were nothing—yet it seemed to Isabel they filled the world. She was driven by a desire to buy them—dozens and dozens of hairpins—stack the store with hairpins for the girls. . . . She laughed at it. She tried to put it aside, but it came back insistent. . . . Later she was to know—when a little thing pursued her like this, nagged at her, insisted on getting done, that it was a key she must take in her fingers and insert in a lock and turn—that the door might swing open into a wide unknown place.

But now it only annoyed her and puzzled her. And when she looked down and saw on the floor by her chair this morning—a bit of shining something—she could not be sure whether it was real or not until she bent over to it and picked it up, relieved. Her fingers closed on something tangible. She held it up.

“That yours, Fannie?”

The girl by the window squinted over to it.

“What?— A hairpin?”

“Oh—likely!” She smoothed a distracted hand over her hair— “They come out so! Specially after it’s washed. I’ve got to get some of those crinkly invisible ones.”

Isabel laughed out.

“What’s the matter?” asked Fannie. Her indignant glance paused—

"Nothing— How many do you want?"

"Want? Of what?" She said it crossly.

"Hairpins," returned Isabel.

"Oh— I don't know. Two-three papers. You never have enough of 'em!"

"I'll get them for you."

"You going in to Camden?"

"No. But I'll get them."

"All right! . . . I heard you went to Camden yesterday— Have a good time?"

"Yes— Don't talk, Fannie. I'll tell you later."

"Well, who began it?" she demanded irascibly. The door of the inner office had opened. John Senior's head came out, glared at them and withdrew.

"There! What did I tell you!" said Fannie. "Don't disturb the alligator while he's feeding!" Her keys clacked righteously on.

At noon Isabel went down to the fence. She went down deliberately—and guiltily. . . . But there was no chance given to mention hairpins.

The girls gathered about, laughing and curious. They all liked Bel Merton. And there was not one of them had not heard how she came riding home last night in a limousine.

"Had a good time, Bel?"— "What'd you do?"

"I—danced," said Isabel. "It was wonderful!"

"No!"— "Did you really?"— "Oh, *I* want to dance. *I want* to dance!"

"I'll show you," said Isabel. "It's easy enough." She seized the girl and tried to guide her. The others looked on—with curious eyes. The rough gravel held the tripping steps. Isabel abandoned

it. "No. It won't do! But I'll show you some-time. It's easy!"

The girl was breathing quickly. She gathered up the hair that had come loose about her neck—groping for it.

Isabel watched her. The guilty feeling swept through her.

"You ought to have some invisible ones," she said, "the kind with crinkles in 'em."

The girl looked at her under lifted arms——

"Don't I know it? But you can't get 'em—not in *this* town!"

"My father is going to have some," she responded coolly. She felt the guilt of Machiavelli as the girls crowded around her——

"No?"— "Bel!"— "Tell him to save me some, will you?"— "When are they coming?"

"Wednesday—I think," she said gravely. "How many do you want?" And then on a slip of paper she took down the orders that flew at her. . . . She regarded the paper a moment and thrust it into her pocket.

"That's all right! You'll have them—'as ordered!'" she said. And she laughed.

"You're a brick, Bel!"

"I don't know what I am," she replied. The bell struck sharply. "But you'll have your hair-pins—I know that!"

All the way home she pondered it. Something shimmered dimly and eluded her. . . . She was grazing the edge of the great business principle

that no man can serve the public without benefiting himself. She had always thought of business as selfish—John Senior's business, shrewd and unyielding . . . and she was getting the girls to buy hairpins of her own father. He would make fifty per cent profit on them.

Her face flushed. Her eyes glowed a little. She did not guess she was face to face with the puzzle every big man of business confronts first or last—that service and success go hand in hand and the man who would succeed must first serve others . . . not with a long-handled soup-ladle reaching down to the poor—but shoulder to shoulder, giving and taking, prospering with those he serves or going down with them—tempting them with new goods in his show-windows because he is a part of the great world-force that wakes them from sleep. . . . Ye are all members one of another. . . . How could anyone believe that? Yet it seemed to shimmer before her.

The paper she held in her hand was not just an order—for hairpins!

She laid it before her father at supper, with a word.

"I can't be bothered!" he said gruffly.

"The girls need them," she said.

"Let 'em send in to Camden," he replied. "It's only a small order!"

She looked down at it—

Yes, that was all it was—a small order. . . . And it was the key in her fingers. But that she did not

know. She only turned away with a little feeling of disappointment.

“Well, I’ll order them myself,” she said.

He only grunted.

“You’ll sell them if I get them, won’t you, father?”

“They’ll have to pay cash,” he grumbled. “I can’t be bothered!”

She laughed. “Of course! Girls always pay cash.”

He gave grudgingly the address of the house through which he ordered goods.

“Can I have the order charged to you?” She looked up from her writing. He was reading the paper.

“I don’t want you mixing into my affairs that way,” he muttered half-surlily.

So she knew he no longer had credit with the wholesale house. She borrowed the money from the housekeeping fund and sent a post-office order. She wondered a little as she dropped the letter in the box whether her father would return the money—or was she making a present to him and to the girls of those crinkly hairpins. . . . She shrugged her shoulders and debated for a minute distributing them herself when they came—taking the money for them—but she knew instinctively this was not what she wanted. . . . She wanted them sold in Merton’s store—and she wanted her father to sell them.

The day they came the store went through a thorough sweeping behind the counter and under the

shelves—it might almost have been said to wash behind its ears—for the first time in a year.

She thought her father looked a little pleased when he came home at night. But she did not look at him closely. She felt as if they were embarking on a great adventure, he and she—he might abandon it at any minute. She looked carefully away from him.

“There’s your money,” he said carelessly. He laid it by her plate. She let it lie. Something went singing inside her.

“Did you have enough to go round?”

He grinned. Well, they et ’em up pretty fast! I shall have to order a few more, I guess.” The singing broke into a chorus, swinging about her.

“That’s good!” She turned from it. “I wish there was a place somewhere in town that we girls could have—” she said.

“A place?” repeated her mother vaguely.

“Yes—a room—big enough. They want to learn to dance.”

“Oh!” Her mother’s face fell. “I don’t know’s the’s any place like that. . . . Mebbe their mothers wouldn’t want them to,” she said slowly and a little coldly.

“I don’t believe they’d mind—my mother doesn’t!” said Isabel. The woman smiled indulgently.

“Well, of course I want you should have a good time if you can. . . . But the’s never been any place like that in Hanover.”

“Never needed it,” said her father. “Folks can

dance all they need to doing dishes, I guess!" He laughed a little glumly.

"There's the engine-house!" said Jimmy. He contributed it from a swift survey of the town.

"Jimmie!" laughed Isabel. "We couldn't dance round the fire engine—like a May-pole!"

"Roll it out!" said Jimmie. She looked at him. "An' roll it in again. Great fun! Say, we boys 'd help!" He was leaning on the table shining at her. She laughed out. She turned to her mother.

Her mother shook her head. "I do' 'no'. Ask him——"

"Would they, father—let us do it?"

He chewed a minute. "I reckon it'd depend on how Silas Atkins feels about it," he said slowly. "If Silas is willing you should teeter the old engine out and in, I don't suppose anybody else is going to object or make a fuss about it."

"An' I'm going to help roll her!" said Jimmie. "Don't you forget that!"

So the decrepit old engine of Hanover was rolled out and in through the wide doors. Silas protested—feebly. But there was something in the air that overruled Silas and swept him along. The rolling of the fire-engine became a function in Hanover. Assisted by small boys he drew it out and saw it safely trundled back. He thought he was merely rolling his old engine in and out for a parcel of girls—but like the wooden horse of Troy, perhaps he trundled in it more than he knew.

XXVI

WHEN Althea Merton gave up her wedding-dress there was a little pang in her heart. She had stood for a minute looking wistfully into the drawer before she took it out and carried it down to the girl. She did not expect ever to use it herself, but she always felt it there in the drawer—the last remnant of her romance.

She could go and look at it any time she wanted to. She had a dumb sense that the world was a little different because she had the silk.

Then she had given it to Isabel and she had experienced an almost fierce joy dipping it in the dye-tub and watching the dress grow into shape—as if the old romance blossomed out of its dry sheath. She had clothed the girl in it with a swift, still joy that seemed to gather up her happiness and distill it in subtler essence. Even the dancing had not dimmed the glow for her. It seemed right that Isabel should dance. The Braithwaites were society people. Isabel belonged to a new time and the new time had new ways. The grayness of life was shot through with rose. . . .

Then the night the old engine was rolled out of its house the girl came down wearing the dress.

Her mother looked up startled.

“You’re not going to wear that best dress!” she said quickly.

"Why, yes, I thought I would. It makes me feel like dancing!"

The woman's eyes rested on it protectingly. "Seems as if you ought to keep it for best," she murmured. A fierce pang assailed her. She could not bear to offer up her last vestige of romance, waste it on a week-day night—in the old engine-house.

"It'll be dirty there," she said. "And grease around, likely!"

"No. It's clean. We've had it scrubbed. And the floor is fine—hardwood!" Isabel's feet danced a little. But her eyes watched the dullness and pain in the look fixed on the dress.

"I sha'n't hurt it, mother!" she said swiftly. "And you want me to wear it— You gave it to me to wear?"

"Yes—for best," assented her mother. "I never thought of your wearing it common like this!"

The girl stood thoughtful, smoothing a fold of the silk in her fingers.

"It doesn't seem common to me," she said softly. "I can't say it—but it seems as if something wonderful were coming, mother!" She looked up with a little catch in her breath. Her feet were not dancing now. They stood very still on the floor. She seemed to grow taller as her mother looked. "Didn't you ever feel that way?" she asked humbly.

"Why, no. I don't know's I ever did."

"As if things bigger than you were making you do what they wanted," said the girl wistfully. "Oh, it's strange and it hurts. But I *long* so to do it,

mother!" She reached out her hands. Her mother looked at them dumbly.

"I guess you better go to your dance," she said in her drab voice. "You won't hurt it—not if you're careful about sitting down . . . and I don't suppose you'll do much sitting down?"

"No—we won't do much sitting!" The catch in her breath broke in a little laugh. "And I'll be careful—I won't hurt it!" Her mother nodded.

"You all ready to go?" she asked.

"Not quite. Where's father?"

"He went out, some place. You want him?"

"No— Only here's an order for some more pins. I thought maybe he'd send it right off." She laid it on the table.

"I'll tell him," said her mother. "You leave it there. You want to take your scarf, don't you?"

"Do you think I need it?" said Isabel.

"Well, dancing so—you'll get all het up. And you don't want to cool off sudden." The sacrifice should be complete and of her own will.

When Isabel returned with the scarf Aaron Merton was standing by the table looking at the paper she had left there.

"You'll send for them, won't you, father?"

"I suppose I'll have to," he grumbled. He looked at her. "What you all fixed up for?"

"I'm going over to the engine-house. We're going to dance— Silas has rolled out the engine for us."

"Humph!" He gazed at her. His eyes had a

curious glow. "I suppose you think you'll catch a beau!" he said half-tauntingly.

"I don't want to catch a beau!" she flashed.

"Hoity-toity! You'll be getting married some day, same as other folks— You'll catch some fellow all right!" He could not take his eyes from her. He seemed to be seeing something that stirred him strangely. . . . The girl was as tall as he, and her eyes on a level with his own regarded him a moment quietly.

"I don't want to just 'catch some fellow' and marry him," she said. "I want to be with the others. . . . It doesn't make any difference whether they're boys or girls— I just want to be with them." She paused, searching it—

"I can't explain to you how it is I feel—but when there's a lot of us doing things together, dancing the way we did at Miss Braithwaite's or singing or anything—just going down the street, walking quick-like, the way we do when we go to work in the morning, it does something to me. I don't feel I am just *one* any more. I'm bigger. I feel as if we could all take hold together and *do* things!"

Her father grunted. He moved a little uneasily.

"Well, you run along and do 'em," he said with a forced laugh. "Nobody's going to hinder you."

He went over to the window and watched her going down the path. There was a puzzled half-irritated look on his face.

A runabout came quickly down the street and stopped in front of the path. John Junior leaped out. Aaron Merton leaned forward with a laugh.

"There—what did I tell you!" he growled.

"No—Bel's not like that!" Her mother spoke sharply. She came over and peered out. "He just happened to come along, I guess. Bel wouldn't say anything that wasn't so."

"Well, she's going with him, all right!"

There had been a minute's parley. Then the girl got in and the car wheeled about and was off—going swiftly up the street.

Aaron Merton watched it with a gruff chuckle.

"You don't change young folks much," he said. "Not for all her hoity-toity ways!"

He straightened his shoulders. A little discomfort slid from them—something that for a moment had passed from the girl's glance to his and stirred him vaguely. . . . As if lost in the tangle of the forest, drugged by tropic-growth, he had heard a horn blow faintly—a high clear note of challenge. Then the call died away. The forest drowsed. The little leaves that had vibrated to it were still again.

He turned from the window with a satisfied shrug.

"Looks as if she was going to do pretty well for herself!" he said casually.

Althea Merton looked at him as if she would speak. She opened her lips. Then she closed them again and began to clear the table. To her, too, it seemed a pleasant thing that Isabel and John Berwick should drive away like that. She sang a little, under her breath, clearing the table. . . .

XXVII

JOHN JUNIOR glanced at her stiffly.

The idea of a drive with Isabel had come to him as an inspiration. He had made a dozen excuses to go to the office. . . . She sat there in her blue serge dress clicking away as if there were nothing in life but the interminable hooks and pot-hangers that changed into words under her flying fingers. He hated note-books. He tried to make her look up.

But the days since John Senior's return were busy ones. She clicked steadily on with only a little nod to show him how very busy she was.

Then the thought of the drive came to him. He would take her for a long drive and they would come back in the twilight and he would watch the changing lights on her face. . . . Dear Isabel!

But she was not dear Isabel, it seemed! She would only let him take her as far as the engine-house and she was full of a happy excitement that shut him out.

"We might drive a little way," he suggested, "and I could leave you there, coming back."

She turned a quick protesting face——

"But I couldn't—I told you! I promised the girls to teach them to dance. They will be waiting for me!"

"Oh, very well!" He devoted himself to driving. Then he relented.

"Why didn't you ask for the rest-room if you wanted to dance? I could have arranged to have it open for you in the evening—if I had known."

She turned a half-smile to him.

"I thought of it," she said.

"You had only to ask," John Junior reminded her. His voice was masterful and kind. She stirred a little. She shook her head.

"No. It wouldn't do!"

"Why not?" a little stiffly.

"Well—" The smile spread quickly. "They don't want to rest. They want to dance!"

John Junior stared at her. She nodded.

"It's such a tired place—the rest-room!" She spread her hands a little.

His face flushed. The rest-room was his one contribution to the works.

"What do you mean by that?" He asked after a minute. He kept the annoyance carefully from his voice.

"It's the name partly," said Isabel slowly thinking it out. "Sad, you know— 'Now-the-day-is-over' and that kind of thing—and then it's the place partly—a north room and sort of poky!" She seemed to study the rest-room to discover what was wrong with it.

"They only use it an hour or two," said John Junior defensively.

"Yes— It's all right for an hour or two," she allowed quickly. Then she laughed.

"Somehow I wanted a new place—where we would

all feel as if something might happen—anything might happen—you know?”

He stared gloomily at the engine-house ahead. The old engine stood on a drunken tilt by the side of the road.

He gave a grim nod. “Anything might happen there, all right!”

But she did not hear him. The wide doors were open and a group of girls clustered just inside were looking out as they drove up.

Isabel nodded and waved her hand and they swarmed out.

“Here’s Bel! Come on girls!” They ran forward to the car and opened the door. Before John Junior could descend, Isabel was among them.

“Thank you!” she said.

He touched his hat stiffly and drove away. They had hardly noticed him. They had not ignored him. They simply did not see him. They were looking at Isabel and their faces were filled with her.

They bore her laughing through the wide doors—

“You never told us you were going to dress up, Bel!” They surveyed her and turned her around and fussed at bows—

“Awfully sweet, isn’t it!”

“I’d have worn mine—if I’d thought anybody else would.” It was regretful—from Millie Matoon.

Isabel turned quickly. “I didn’t mean to wear it Millie! But I just did . . . I guess it was silly in me!”

“No. It’s lovely! Come on!”

The victrola was playing and they pirouetted and swayed and took half-tentative dancing steps. . . . One by one Isabel showed them the steps the young man had taught her in the library, swinging and swaying with them, making them feel that dancing is "just being alive and happy." They caught the rhythm and yielded to it and embroidered it with tripping light-flitting steps.

Then swiftly certain girls seemed to emerge and the music focused in them. The others stood aside to watch . . . and presently they were caught back again into the glow and were dancing with happy abandon . . . two lanterns swinging from a beam above cast a faint light on the moving heads and shoulders. Around the lanterns flew high-circling moths in a nimbus of light, and the uplifted faces drifted into the light and passed into shadow. Outside the darkness had come on. The wide doors stood open to it, and figures moved across it dimly, peering into the engine-house. Youths collected in groups and went slowly or halted by the wide doors—drawn like the moths in the high circle of light.

The girls paused and drifted to the doors fanning their flushed cheeks. The youths outside parleyed, they demanded to be let in. But Isabel refused them sternly.

"Not to-night."

"Next week, perhaps—or the week after." In the faint light that shone outside the door the young men took clumsy dancing steps, they jostled and made grotesque leaping motions. They watched the

moving figures and called out. Their boisterous shouts clashed with the music and stirred the blood.

At ten o'clock the lanterns were taken from the beam and blown out. The moths vanished. Silas Atkins, assisted by four small boys, rolled the old engine back to its place. The wide doors were closed.

Hanover went to sleep.

But in dreams the little dance tunes kept time. The faces smiled in their sleep.

XXVIII

BERWICK'S MILL hummed with the song. . . .
Over and under the steady whir of machines it rose
and dipped and spread its shining wings——

“What is yours?” . . . “I'm going to have—!”
. . . “Mine's going to be!” The frills grew and
fluted and trilled.

And Isabel looking on and listening saw a vision—
She closed her eyes swiftly, bewildered——

“No!”

She pressed it back. . . . “No— No!”

But the vision returned and knocked gently, ironic-
ally, insistently. . . .

She took up her note-book and sought John Senior.

“Will you give me the address of the best furnish-
ing house you deal with?” She said it almost belliger-
ently.

He looked her over. “What you going to do with
it!”

“I don't know yet. I want to—order some goods,
I guess.”

He started.

“You going to get married, Bel?” There was
plain alarm in it. She shook her head, dismissing it.

“I just want to get things. At least I think I do.”

“Going to spend your raise on foolishness,” he
grumbled. “Well—Dart's in Boston is as good a
place as any. They're fair. I've dealt with 'em

twelve years. Never had a word of complaint either way. You know we stock 'em with hosiery right along—best grades." She nodded and hesitated and turned away.

"I thought you'd say they were, but I wanted to make sure. . . . Would you mind my using your name?" she asked abruptly.

"Why, no—certainly not!" He laughed genially. "Not if you don't get me in too deep," he added.

She shook her head. "I can't promise. I don't know how deep I'm going to get in myself. I wish I did!"

He looked at her curiously. There was a little flush in her face, and her eyes danced with stars. But behind the stars something glowed. It looked at him, returning his scrutiny steadily.

"What are you up to, Bel?" he asked severely.

"I wouldn't dare tell you!" she laughed.

"Well—I guess we'll risk it. And you can let me know if you want my advice." He looked at her.

"Sure you don't want me to invest your money?" he suggested.

She shook her head. "I need my money myself. . . . I need all I have—and more," she added over her shoulder and left him.

That night she wrote the letter to Dart and Company—a long letter that had to be written and re-written several times before it was finished to her satisfaction. She mailed it late on the way home. After supper she approached her father.

"I'd like to put some things in the store next

week—if you don't mind," she said carelessly. He started. "What you want to do that for?" he asked shortly.

"For the girls. They need things—lots of things they can't get here. Dresses and——"

"Dresses!" he snorted. He shook it off decisively. "I can't sell dresses!"

"No. I'm going to sell them."

He looked at her. "You going to leave Berwick's?" he demanded.

"Saturday afternoons," she replied. "We're free, you know. I'll sell and they'll buy. I plan to sell everything I put in—clear it all up in one day."

"Oh, you do!" It was scornful and sceptical.

"May I have the show-cases and shelves on the left of the door?" she asked.

He considered it grudgingly.

"I can't have you disturbing my drugs, you know."

"I sha'n't disturb your drugs. I promise you! And I'll put everything back the way I found it—when I'm through."

"All right." He granted it.

She rested on that—for the time. There were other things she wanted—more important things, but she must wait.

She swept and dusted and scrubbed the space she had secured. She washed the show-cases and put fresh papers on the shelves and washed the window. Her father watched her with gloomy eye.

"I don't see what you want to make such a fuss for—just for one afternoon."

"I like it!" said Isabel.

"If they're going to buy, they'll buy," he persisted, "without your killing yourself!"

"But I'm not killing myself—I'm just having a good time!" She was smiling at him.

He grunted. The next night when she came in from the mill she found both windows shining clean and the whole place smelling of soap and water.

"Mis' Atkins's been in fussing around," he grumbled. It was his only reference to concessions.

XXIX

THE order from Hanover to Dart and Company was duly passed up by the mail-order clerk to the Head of his Department. He read it with a little perplexed frown and tossed it to the Head of Employment Department who occupied the same cubicle in the ground-glass partitioned space on the fourth floor.

“I wish you would see what you make of that!”

James Murphy read it slowly. The look of interest deepened in his face——

“Who is she——ever hear of her before?”

“Never!” emphatically. “What does she think she’s doing——” He moved a vague, irritated hand.

“Take it to the Personal Service Bureau,” said Murphy promptly.

“Good idea—— Humph!” The man’s face lighted. He leaned over and made a note on the edge of the letter. James Murphy’s hand retained it a moment. He was copying the address on a memo-pad he took from his pocket.

“What are you doing that for?” asked the other suspiciously.

“I’m not sure what I’m doing it for,” laughed Murphy. “I always put down a live wire when I come across it!” He returned the pad to his pocket.

The other man took up the letter and went out.

James Murphy looked thoughtfully at his desk.

He was a man of quick decision and quick action. Dart and Company paid him liberally. They valued him, as they supposed, for clear-headedness and the ability to manage men. They had not discovered that clear-headedness was hardly more than an open-minded readiness to entertain what he called a hunch, and his power to handle men only another name for a quick, uncanny instinct of when to give way and when to go ahead. . . . Flexibility and the sense of humor in James Murphy did for Dart and Company what in the good autocratic days of business was supposed to be achieved only by a man of fixed determination and iron will. . . . He understood himself perhaps little better than did Dart and Company. But he understood things about the business that were sealed to them.

In spite of lunch-rooms, co-operative ideas, votes, and profit-sharing, he knew that Dart and Company belonged to the good old days of shark business. They nosed about in a dim ooze of profit and loss. They gobbled or were gobbled according to the run of the tide. Theoretically, the employees ran the business on strictly democratic lines. Every employee had a vote according to rank and term of service, and therefore the employees controlled the business. Practically, Dart and Company held the money—and therefore controlled the business. The theory of democracy was not a sop flung to the employees. It was an honestly extended olive-branch. Dart and Company would have been glad to go

further—offer up the whole olive-tree if need be—but they recognized danger to the Ark in uncharted waters. . . . They did not see their way clear to allowing employees control over real money. Neither did James Murphy. But he saw clearly, what Dart and Company only glimpsed in uneasy moments—that the conduct of the business had no real relation to the tide of life that was running in the world.

He attended meetings of the employees and cast his vote with the rest, and apportioned fines and honors and advances on the pay-roll—but he knew that the profits shared by a thousand did not differ essentially from profits shared by Dart and Company alone.

Something was lacking. James Murphy suspected that the thing that was lacking was life.

The process was mechanical. Perhaps it ought to be biological? He pondered it. . . .

A genuinely “democratic” business he was coming to suspect would be a business—that grows and develops as a tree or an animal or a man grows and develops—alive all over. . . . All the parts of a live business must be vitally interdependent—not nominally and mechanically interdependent.

Stated in these terms, James Murphy saw that a live business was a terrible risk.

You cannot throw money about recklessly—without a string tied to it. Money must be protected, kept safe—for the good of the business. James Murphy recognized this as clearly as did Dart and

Company. He knew the sacred obligation of money. But he had a hunch that there might be a *live* way of doing business—if one could hit on it. Business as the medium of exchange between living beings, itself a living thing, must be governed by biologic law.

Meanwhile he was the most successful department manager Dart and Company had in their employ. They called him a good mixer.

He wondered sometimes whether the parts of an organism were not held together, run together, "animated" by something different from the parts themselves—something without which they would be inactive, sluggish, half-alive—a kind of "life force"—electricity—radium? He could not name it—safely. But he knew that group-work had its own peculiar laws and principles. To Dart and Company twelve men selected and set to a given piece of work were twelve men and should be treated as twelve men. To Murphy the group was something entirely different from the twelve men. It was more than twelve times bigger than any one of them—and different.

"I get the dozen together," he would say. "Nothing doing! I take nine of the dozen and three new ones, and they seem to melt together. They move and speak and act like one man. They think and act together—get things done!"

He knew dimly that he got the best results from men working together who were not too much alike . . . but he had never been able to make Dart and Company understand that he liked a few stupid ones

in every batch. . . . A group of "picked" men he had discovered was likely to be *too* keen, too efficient, too enterprising—each man for himself! They were "dead" in the group-sense—

There were elements and combinations in the region of the spirit as truly as in the material world. But their laws and psychology were hidden from him.

He sat staring at his desk, thinking of the letter he had just read.

Something in it gave him a sense that this "Isabel"— He glanced at the name on his pad— "Isabel Merton—Hanover" was conducting her business in an interesting way. He would like to know more about her.

Dart and Company needed new blood, all the new blood they could get. . . .

The head of the Mail-Order Department laid the letter before the head of the Personal Service Bureau.

"Can you make anything out of it?" he asked cautiously.

She read a page and looked ahead and looked back. Her eyes skimmed it rapidly. Her face lighted—
"Why—don't you see?"

"Can't say I do! Here—" He took it and turned a page. . . . "This dress is for a blond, short, usually smiling, bust 36 in., skirt 28, neck square—not too low. Blue material, with sleeves soft white stuff—a little of same at neck."

"Now what does she think she's doing!" he said

scornfully. "Having a dress made to order? The whole thing is like that—and she wants them by Wednesday—rush order! What do you think we'd better do with it?"

The woman was deep in the letter. She looked up with a twinkle at the question——

"Do—? Why, fill the order, of course!"

"Make her seventeen dresses—to sell on commission. And have them back on our hands next week? We don't do business that way." He said it firmly.

"But you see—she says she will buy them outright with the privilege of returning twenty-five per cent of the order within ten days—or she will take them on commission, returning all goods not sold. That's fair enough."

"But goods to order!" he protested.

The woman laughed. "You don't see what she's after! She's just trying to give us an idea of the personality of the dresses."

"Personality of the—dresses!" He surveyed it and shook his head. "I don't get it!"

"Well, I do. It's the most sensible order I've had in a long time. I'd like to know the girl that wrote it." She was looking at the letter reflectively. "You see the little sketches here on the edge—to help out? She's clever."

"Too clever for me!" admitted the man.

"I wish you'd let me have this order," he said quickly, "give me a free hand—will you?"

"All right." He glanced along the pages. "There are other things, you see, besides the dresses

—neckwear, toilet articles, manicure pieces—with discretion to use ‘judgment.’” He smiled sceptically. “You want the whole thing?”

“Every item!” she replied, answering the smile with a satisfied nod. “I’m going to have a good time with it!”

“Hanover is a small place,” said the man, holding on to it doubtfully. “We get our hosiery line from there—Berwick’s, you know. These things are probably going to mill-girls. Don’t make the mistake of sending things she can’t sell.”

“She is going to have the best the store can give her,” rejoined the woman. “And I would be willing to make a good big bet we don’t have them back either.”

“Oh, all right!— Wednesday, you see she says. You will have to put it through fast.”

The next day the entire force of the Personal Service Bureau of Dart and Company was turned on to the order from Hanover. They woke up and laughed. They debated details and scanned the order with keen interest. Something of the devotion that had focused itself on Millie Matoon and had evoked a dress “usually smiling,” communicated itself to the staff of Dart and Company.

Echoes of it reached James Murphy. He stopped at the Personal Service Bureau.

“We should not need *you* if we had a few like her in every community,” he suggested to the head. “You would lose *your* business!”

“She would make business for me,” replied the

woman. "She isn't stealing other people's market. She's making a new one."

"Maybe you're right. . . . Just room-rent and the right kind of woman—wake up a big trade—every little community. . . ."

She nodded. "That's it!— Big trade!"

James Murphy went on contented. He knew he could wake up big trade— But he had other things in his head just then to think of that interested him more than waking up trade.

XXX

ISABEL encountered the expressman on the way to the mill. He halted her and held up a hand——

“There’s a lot of truck come for you up t’ the station,” he announced. “Where you want it delivered?— Much as six-seven boxes of it.”

“Take it to my father’s store,” said Isabel. She went on with quick steps, smiling. It was the first time she had ever said “my father’s store” without a little sense of shame.

She found him working over the boxes when she came in that night. He had opened them and the contents were ready to lift from their wrappings. She looked about her dubiously.

“I think I’ll leave them there for the present.” She nodded to the box.

“They’ll get all wrinkled, won’t they?” he protested.

“Well, perhaps. But I can’t risk having them exposed for so long. . . . We can unpack the show-case things now.”

He helped her take out the filmy fichus and delicate ribbons and cuffs and collars and arrange them in the show-case. The colors glowed behind the glass till they seemed to light up the room.

“We’ll cover them over till Saturday,” said Isabel. She looked thoughtfully toward the back-room.

There was a sound of mumbled low voices from the back-room and now and then the clearing of a throat and spitting.

She knew who were in there— Andrew Crane and Roger Jepson. They were always in the back-room. They spent their days there. And her father with them. . . .

“I don’t suppose I could have the back-room to use?”

He started and glanced at her.

“For a trying-on room and to hang the dresses in?”

“No, I couldn’t spare the back-room,” he said hastily.

She sighed. “Well—we’ll have to do the best we can. . . . Perhaps we can string a curtain across here—” She stood looking at it.

The door opened. Two men came out of the room. They were tall and their shoulders stooped a little. Both had red rims about the eyes.

She glanced at them and nodded pleasantly.

“Good-evening, Mr. Crane. Good-evening, Mr. Jepson.” It was cordial but reserved.

They mumbled past her with side glances at the show-case.

Aaron Merton followed them to the door. They were older men and he seemed to follow in their wake as if they swept him along.

“Come again!” he said with forced joviality.

They nodded. They looked back into the store where the girl stood glowing against the show-case

with its flimsy feminine trifles. Jepson nodded sourly. He spat to one side.

"We'll be round to-morrow," he said.

They went down the street, their canes held loosely and dragging a little.

Aaron stood in the door looking after them, his hands in his pockets. Presently he came back to the store.

Isabel hovering over the unpacked boxes looked up. There was a kind of soft brilliance about her. . . . He motioned toward the door of the back-room.

"You might as well have it—for your trying-on—if you want it," he said.

It seemed to her her heart stopped beating. Then it went on with a leap. She crossed to the door and opened it and her glance swept the room—small and bare and filled with a stale flat smell that choked her a little. . . . Three chairs and a table and three dirty tumblers on the shelf. . . . There was nothing else in the back-room—but the stale smell.

She had never seen the inside of the room before. It had always stood to her for vague shame, a shadowy menace. It seemed amazing that there was nothing sinister about it—just the flat stale smell of deadness.

She moved to one of the windows and threw it up and then to the other. The spring air came in freshly. She turned back. Her father was standing in the door, his hands in his pockets.

"All right for you?" he asked.

"Fine!" She looked about her happily. "It couldn't be better. I'll clear it up a little tomorrow."

"Better have Mis' Atkins do the heft of it," he said. "She's coming over in the morning. I'll put her in here, first thing——"

Isabel came out. She looked back at the room. She glanced about her for a piece of paper and found a large sheet and wrote on it in her clear firm hand:

"Engaged. No Admittance— Closed for Repairs." She pinned the paper firmly on the door and stood back and looked at it. Her father glanced up. He came over.

"What's that?" he asked sharply.

He read it grimly and turned away.

"You ready to go home?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm ready, I guess."

He closed the door and locked it and put the key in his pocket. There was no need to leave any one in the store. There would be no customers. And Jepson and Andrew Crane had gone home for the night.

When they arrived the next morning Aaron was outside the door. He did not follow them into the store. They took their accustomed path to the back-room. At the door they halted.

The door was open and inside Mrs. Atkins on her knees was scrubbing with a large brush. They looked down at her silently. Jepson's eye turned. It read the sign on the door.

He pointed a long finger and Crane brought his red-rimmed eyes close to it and read it slowly. They turned about and went back—past the show-case with the gay shining colors, past the clean counter to a bench outside the store.

They sat down on the narrow bench. They folded their hands on top of their canes and gazed straight ahead. Aaron Merton seemed to have disappeared.

Jepson spat sideways and cleared his throat.

“Women!” he said.

“Yep!— Gew-gaws!”

They did not speak again. After a little while they rose and went down the street, their loose-held canes dragging and tapping uncertainly as they went.

The next day they did not return—nor the next. They had found another roosting-place.

The little back-room smelled rankly of soap-suds.

XXXI

THE car stopped in front of the mill and Ellen Braithwaite looked up at the office windows.

She got out quickly. She was late. The door might be locked— But the latch yielded to her touch and she went swiftly down the hall and upstairs to the office.

She was going to take Isabel home with her. She had formed the habit of coming in and carrying her off like this. Sometimes she drove her home and sometimes they went for long drives and Isabel spent the night with her.

She had not seen her for over a week now. She had been out of town and busy. . . .

There was a flush of pleasure on her face as she tapped on the office door.

“Come in!” It was a high quick voice and Ellen Braithwaite turned the knob reluctantly.

The girl at the typewriter by the window cast a look of inquiry at her.

“Oh— It’s you?” she said stiffly. She half turned back to her machine.

“Is Miss Merton here?”

“No.” It was short. “Bel’s left.”

“Left?” The voice was puzzled.

“Yes. ‘Left.’” The word mimicked the cul-

tivated intonation. "Don't you see it's after hours?" She motioned brusquely to the clock over John Senior's desk.

Ellen Braithwaite moved toward the door.

"She's gone home. I'm finishing up for her," said Fannie.

"She isn't ill?"

"No." It was short again. There was fierce jealousy in the eyes by the window. . . . She needn't think because she could carry off Bel in her car any time she liked—she needn't think she owned her! The shoulders shrugged themselves toward the machine. Ellen Braithwaite accepted the snub unseeing.

"I suppose I shall find her at home," she said thoughtfully. She opened the door.

Fannie's close-shut mouth watched her go. . . . She heard the footsteps growing faint. She held her peace. A door below slammed.

She leaned out—far out.

"Oh— Say!" she called.

Ellen looked up.

"She didn't go home!" said Fannie crossly. "She's down there at the store."

"Thank you!" said Ellen Braithwaite. She moved a grateful hand. But the gesture was lost.

The head had disappeared. There was only a blank window. No sign of Fannie attacking her copy fiercely—no echo of words addressed spitefully to the machine.

"Pig!" and again fiercely "Pig-pig-pig!" Click-

ety-clack! Clack-clack! Clickety-clack! Clack-clack-clack!

Ellen Braithwaite waited a second. She looked up hopefully at the window. But there was no sign. She spoke to the chauffeur and got in.

She wondered a little that Isabel should be at the store. Her memory of the store was vivid. She had called there one afternoon in driving through, to try to get a cork for the thermos-bottle. She had remained only long enough for the surly refusal and had escaped into the fresh clean air with a feeling of relief. . . . She could not imagine Isabel in the store.

She leaned back in the car, smiling—thinking of the girl who was coming to play so large a part in her life. . . . Merely to have her near—going about the house, sitting by the fire reading, talking with her father—whatever Isabel did pleased her and gave her a sense of youth. It was not so much that she recalled her own youth to her, as that she was the spirit of youth itself. All her own sophisticated girlhood—the years of flitting from one European capital to another, became unreal and vague, a half-remembered dream. . . . She was alive and responding to the happiness that overflowed from the girl's presence.

But Isabel in Aaron Merton's drug-store!

She recalled the place with a little shiver of disgust.

The car stopped and she got out reluctantly. She would call for her and carry her swiftly away. . . . Through the open door the light behind her shone into the dim room.

Bits of color emerged shadowily. The dusky interior seemed to glow and come alive with color as she peered in bewildered. There was no one in the store and she moved about uncertainly bending to the show-cases—looking with her near-sighted gaze at the shelves behind the cases. A vague smile touched her lips.

A sound came from the door of the back-room and she whirled about——

“Isabel—!” She moved an imperious hand that took in the room— “What is it all about?” she demanded. Isabel laughed.

“Come in here!” She drew her toward the back-room.

They stood in the doorway looking in. . . . The plain square room with its white walls and doors seemed a place withdrawn—an oratory of cleanliness. . . . Aaron Merton coming on it that morning had had a slow uneasy feeling that he was looking on a place swept and garnished. It was white and clean and still. The spirits of Crane and Roger Jepson were exorcised forever. . . . Thin white curtains depended from brass rods, and behind the curtains long light sprays of forsythia and maple-buds reached nearly to the window-tops. They showed faintly through the thin sheer material against the light outside.

“Charming!” said Ellen Braithwaite. “But what is it, child?”

“I’m getting ready for to-morrow,” said Isabel. She motioned to the large open box in the middle

of the room— “I’m going to take them out and you can stay and help.” She bent over the box.

“But I want to take you home with me,” said Ellen Braithwaite quickly. Isabel shook her head.

“Not to-night. I can’t—not to-night!” She lifted a dress and shook it a little and held it out.

“I am going to have a sale— See?” She balanced it deftly on a hanger and slipped it on the pole that ran across one side of the room.

“That will be nice for Emily Wood!” she said. She stood back and looked at it.

Ellen Braithwaite drew off her gloves and dropped to her knees by the box.

“You are crazy!” she murmured. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

They lifted the garments and smoothed them and hung them up, revelling in them. The light grew dim. The forsythia stems behind the curtains were vaguely dark. The dresses they lifted and hung in place became light-swaying ghosts.

The room was a charmed place.

Ellen Braithwaite leaned quickly and kissed Isabel.

“I must go!” she said. “I’m late to dinner. That’s the last one, isn’t it?” She gazed at the dress Isabel was placing on the pole.

“Isn’t it sweet!” She came nearer to it. “I *must* have that one, dear—! Sell it to me!”

But Isabel covered it with protecting hands.

“That is Millie Matoon’s dress,” she said sternly. “You can’t have Millie’s dress!”

"But you can order another one for her!"

"And how would Millie feel to-morrow—with all the others having their pretty things!" She drew her away from temptation and Ellen yielded with a smile.

"Besides," said Isabel, "it's not your style!"

"No." Ellen Braithwaite was meek. "I knew you would say that. . . . I took the sketch you made for me to Madame Letska. She says it will be wonderful. You should have heard her rave—'Extraordinaire and chic, Mademoiselle!'" She spread her hands.

"Yes. It's just right for you," said Isabel. There was no pride in the words. They simply stated a fact.

Ellen Braithwaite looked at her critically. "I don't see how you do it, Isabel. You just to take a pencil and it comes trailing off the point."

"Oh, I think about it—" protested Isabel. "And I love it too," she added half-shyly. "You have to coax them a little, you know!"

"Was that how you came to think of doing this?" She moved a hand to the light-swaying dresses suspended from their pole. She looked at Isabel—"Did you coax the idea of selling things till it came alive like this?"

For a moment in the dim light the girl's face seemed to draw back. . . . "Oh, I didn't coax!" she said under her breath. "I did not want it—I did not want it!" she repeated the words almost fiercely and put out a hand—fending it off.

"Then why——?"

"I couldn't help it! It wouldn't let me go! I tried to run away from it!" There was fear and swift awe in the words. "But it swept me along. . . . When I tried to hold back, it got bigger and bigger—swallowed me up!" She ended with a breathless gasp and a laugh. Her hand rested on Ellen Braithwaite's shoulder. Her eyes seemed looking at a vision beyond the dim room.

Ellen Braithwaite put an arm about her protectingly.

"You mean the money and the risk?"

The vision broke in a quick laugh. "Oh, dear, no!— I'm selling them on commission. And anyway the girls will want them. They are crazy to buy. They're all coming alive! . . . That's what I mean—what I am afraid of. There's something happening here in Hanover. It's big and still and down underneath. . . . And nobody knows it's here—but me! And at night it comes with its bigness—and I am afraid! It lets me see things—just in a flash and then it's gone. But it knows I'll have to do what it wants. . . ."

"I am afraid of it! I am afraid!— Why are there things like that in the world!" she demanded.

Her hands were clinched at her sides and she seemed to grow and fill the room with the demand of her youth.

Ellen Braithwaite bent to her swiftly. "I will help you! Let me come to-morrow—and help sell them." She motioned with a quick hand to the dresses swaying mistily.

"No, no! You mustn't!"

"Oh—if you don't want me—!" She drew back.

"But it isn't whether I want you—and it isn't *me* at all! It's the girls and me *together*. I can't get away from them. . . . I don't want to get away from them—I don't want to get away!" She half-whispered the words. "If you were here something would stop. It would be dead."

"Yes, I would kill anything I touched—I know!" Her voice admitted it bitterly.

Isabel's hand reached to her. "Wait!" she said, "till I know. . . . Then I shall need you. But now I don't even know what it is I am trying to do—Perhaps I'm just trying to make money!" she added whimsically.

There was a step in the outer room——

"There is father! He is back from supper."

They passed into the outer room. Aaron Merton lighting a lamp on a side-bracket turned his head a little. The match flared up and lighted his face and made it darkly keen, glancing at them.

"This is Miss Braithwaite, father. I've been showing her the new things."

"I'm glad to meet you," said Aaron. He came over and held out his hand. The face the match had lighted up for an instant was dull again. But Isabel had a sense that her father was pleased.

He motioned to the show-cases. "We've got some mighty pretty things," he said carelessly.

"They are charming!" Ellen Braithwaite bent over the case. "You really must let me buy something, Isabel—for good luck!"

"They're all for sale," said Aaron genially.

Isabel hovered protectingly near. But Ellen Braithwaite ignored her.

"I want that collar," she said, "the one with embroidered ends—yes. I really must have it!"

Isabel took it out reluctantly. Her fingers seemed to smooth and caress it. They made a half-jealous movement to return it to the case.

"Millie Matoon's?" asked Ellen mischievously. Isabel shook her head—

"I'd thought of Edith Shephard," she said softly.

"How much have you marked it?" asked Aaron. He reached a quick hand to the tag—

"A dollar and a half, Miss Braithwaite."

"I'll take it," said Ellen promptly. Her fingers pressed the money into Isabel's coaxingly. "Just for luck!" she whispered. "I want to be in it—Don't shut me out of all the bigness, Isabel!"

The little smile lingered on Isabel's lips after the car rolled away. She was rearranging the collars in the case to cover the vacant spot.

Her father came over and looked in. "You're not much of a salesman!" he said jovially. "Why, she wouldn't 'a' bought a thing—if it hadn't been for me!" Isabel looked up. The smile on her lips leaped up and touched her eyes—

"That's right, father—I don't believe she would!"

He nodded proudly. "It takes experience. . . . There's a knack in everything—even selling goods. You have your stock there—and your customer. All you have to do is to link 'em up."

"Yes, that's all!" said Isabel quietly. The stars in her eyes were lighted now. They danced a little.

"Take just the right minute—say just the right thing," said Aaron expansively, "and you've turned the trick! It's a knack—like everything else."

"I'd thought of leaving some of the things here—after to-morrow," said Isabel. "Would you mind? They could stay in the cases—there might be customers!" She looked at him inquiringly.

"Sure!" he said heartily. "Glad to help you out!" He looked reflectively at the show-case, his hands in his pockets. "I don't see why I shouldn't keep this sort of thing right along. . . . There might be money in it."

"Yes. There might be," admitted Isabel. She held her breath.

"No harm in trying," said Aaron. He whistled softly through his teeth a minute, gazing at the things in the case.

She left him standing there staring at the feminine trifles. She went into the back-room. Her heart held itself. The light-hanging ghosts swayed dimly and illusively. . . . They seemed to be trying to signal to her.

XXXII

IN the back-room they hovered and hummed—with the buzz and whir of a hive. . . . The voices rose and fell in an exultant happy rhythm.

Aaron Merton alone in the outer store with the show-cases had little trade. A girl would come hesitatingly in and pause a minute hovering above the dainty things in the case. Then the laughter and hum in the room beyond would sweep her along and Aaron would be left alone staring at the door.

He stared a little resentfully at the back-room. Then he glanced through the window at the sidewalk. A Greek girl had descended from her farm-wagon and was tying her horse to the ring in front of the store. Aaron watched her idly. . . . Those Greeks had a way with them as if they owned all creation! Heads up, striding along——

The girl moved toward the door.

She stopped a minute peering into the front window. Then she came in with her free striding step.

“I want that belt in the window,” she said carelessly.

Aaron reached for it.

“Anything more?” He was doing it up with efficient fingers.

She hung over the show-case absorbed in muslins and ribbons and lace.

"I'll have that one." She pointed to a delicate piece of neckwear. It was the most expensive thing in the case—a shimmering cobweb lightness.

Aaron took it out gingerly. He did it up.

"Anything more? Nice veils," he nodded. "Fifty cents and a dollar!"

She shook her head. A burst of laughter came to them from the back-room. The girl wheeled——

"What's in there?" she asked quickly.

"Just girls," said Aaron. He handed over the parcels— "Nine-fifty, please." He wondered a little whether she had it. He knew now who she was. He remembered—old Grundiles' girl. The old man died last year and left the farm to her. She probably had money enough—if she wanted to spend it.

He watched her while she opened her shabby purse and counted out the money. There was a large roll of bills left he noted as she closed the purse and tucked it in the bosom of her gown. She turned her head again to the door.

"They got—sell—in there?" She pointed.

"Some dresses," said Aaron grudgingly. He felt an uneasy sense of competition with the back-room.

"I go in!" She moved to the door. He had no time to intervene or to consider whether Isabel would want a strange girl in there. Anyway it was none of his business.

She opened the door and stood in it, tall and commanding, staring in.

A hush fell on the laughter. They gazed at the tall straight figure and the dark slumbrous eyes and

mobile face. Their glances travelled down the rough dress to her clumsy shoes.

She seemed not to see the stares and the parted lips. She pushed past the silence and walked straight to the pole of hanging dresses. She pointed unerringly.

“That!” she said.

The room stirred subtly and shook its shoulders quiveringly and looked at Isabel. She came forward. She reached up to the dress and took it down.

“How much?” said the girl decisively. “I take.”

Isabel breathed a sigh. Then she glanced at the firm straight shoulders and the long flowing lines of the girl’s figure. Even under the coarse cloth the lines revealed themselves subtly.

“It is twenty-five dollars,” said Isabel.

“I take!” The girl opened her purse.

In silence Isabel drew out a box and laid the dress in it. She smoothed it, touching it here and there with quick gentle fingers. She drew up the tissue paper about the shining folds and put on the cover of the box.

The girl watched her sombrely. There was not a sound in the room. It centred in the box and the suddenly-snatched dress—as if Fate entered, inexorable and grim, despoiling the hive.

The girl paid the money silently into Isabel’s hand. She took up the box and strode from the room.

The hive stirred and shook tentatively. Wings rose in a whirring hum. They circled about Isabel and darted swiftly.

“How mean of her!” . . . “I wanted that one myself!” . . . “Why did you let her?”

“I was just going to try that one on—!” It was a protesting wail from Millie Matoon.

Isabel turned with a little swift gesture of reproof—

“But you couldn’t wear it, Millie. It wasn’t your style! See— Here—this one is much more like you!” She whirled the blue-and-white lightness from the pole and swirled it before Millie’s doubting gaze and let it fall in graceful folds.

“Oh!— I hadn’t seen that one!” breathed Millie.

“Try it on!” said a voice. “Here—let me unhook you!”

They were in all stages of dress and undress and half-dress, fluttering to the mirror and preening and fluttering back to Isabel for advice and pins. They circled about and darted off and came back to her. And she adjusted necks and snipped seams and turned back edges. She patted them in place and let out folds and took them in and made new ones.

Her face wore a rapt look. Her fingers flew like swift transforming eyes.

Behind the screen little Miss Sparks sewed and stitched and snipped, inarticulate with pins. Only by waving movements of her hands did she command them to advance or retreat—or dismissed them with satisfied nod.

And through the stir and bustle ran a curious unity—an intimacy that seemed seeking for each girl the dress that was best suited and belonged to her by right. . . . That Isabel guided the changing move-

ment was hardly evident. She herself could not have told what she wished or whether she was helping to bring it about.

She had gone over the dresses before the girls came, assigning each one in her mind to some particular girl. But now that they were here, turning to each other—laughing, talking, demanding, comparing—she saw them with new and bewildered eyes. They seemed to change subtly as she watched them. But through all the flutter and movement she knew they turned unerringly to her for the final decision.

She felt queer happy thrills, moving among them. Not even the dancing had made her happy—like this! . . . They seemed to press on her. They needed her. And then they moved away from her light and buoyant and strong. . . . She watched them mistily. She wanted to gather them all into her arms—all the pretty dresses in the back-room and the eager lighted-up faces—and cry a little because she was so happy.

“There!” She stood back, pushing them off and gazing—

“That’s all now!”

A sigh went up. Somebody laughed.

“There are two left!”

They motioned to the dresses hanging disconsolate from the pole—two that nobody wanted.

“And Alice Mann hasn’t any! Try that green one on, Alice!” But Isabel intervened.

“I think the Greek girl took Alice’s,” she said. They gazed sympathetically at Alice Mann.

“You hadn’t ought to ‘a’ let her!”

"My! But she was quick—"I take!"— Just that—and out she goes!" They laughed.

"I'm going to order another for Alice." Isabel slipped an arm about the girl's waist.

Some one on the other side slipped an arm about Isabel. The circle of entwining arms grew and closed in with little curtsying dancing steps and alluring looks that sought each other smiling. They broke into soft humming. It was not a song they knew and remembered that they hummed gently moving back and forth. No one led the singing. It seemed to come of itself out of the whole circle at once—rising and falling as the circle advanced or drew back in the happy swaying dance.

Miss Sparks from behind her screen came out and looked on. The room was filled with the swaying lightness. If the exorcised spirits of Andrew Crane and Roger Jepson could have looked down they would have felt lonely—and a little afraid perhaps of the weaving singing circle. . . . Delicate, light as air—made up of girls' delight. . . . A wind-blown seed may one day cleave the rock asunder. An evanescent force set free lifts a world and sends it singing and swinging through space to the new quick life. . . .

A knock sounded on the door. The circle dissolved.

The girls moved lightly. They looked toward the door askance.

Isabel opened it.

Aaron Merton stood there. He half peered in.

"You 'most through?" he asked. "There's a

lot of things out here to sell. They want to see 'em before they go home, don't they?"

The girls flocked out in their lightness. The bright dresses filled the dingy store. They chattered and bought and stripped the cases. . . . They knew there was money in the bank in Camden—Even if they spent all they had in their purses to-day there was money in the bank. . . . They had not known there were things like this for them. This was what money was for! They chattered and bought.

Aaron Merton did up parcels in swift haste.

When the last one was tied up and the new dresses had been taken off and placed carefully in the boxes and each girl had departed carrying the cherished box in her hand—Aaron Merton in the deserted store looked across to Isabel.

"A pretty good day's business," he said complacently. He paused and wiped his forehead.

"That's the way to do business—have sales—not potter along!"

She nodded. Her lip trembled. She looked at the show-cases with their scattered trifles. Aaron was looking thoughtfully at the door of the back-room.

Little Miss Sparks was coming out. She said good-night hurriedly as she passed him. Aaron went toward the back-room. He peered uncertainly into the dimness. Two shapes depended from the poles.

"Well—I swan!" He glanced back to Isabel by the counter—

"Only two left!" he said solemnly.

Her face in the dusk was a little pale.

"Only two," she assented quietly.

"I'll bet we could sell those two—if we advertised 'em!" The idea grew in his face and illumined it—"You saw that Greek—how she nabbed things up! You just let me take those dresses and show 'em to some Greek or Pole!" He expanded with it. He snapped his fingers.

"No!" she said quickly. "They're going back to-night."

He stared. "Don't you want to sell dresses? Isn't that what you got 'em for—what we've had all this fuss for—to sell dresses? I tell you some Polander'd snatch 'em up quick!"

"I don't want it!" she said.

Her glance swept the empty store. His own followed it slowly.

"What *do* you want?" he asked testily.

"I don't know—what I want." She spoke gropingly. She was tired.

Then she turned to him swiftly with something shining in her eyes——

"Isn't it splendid, father! We didn't think we could do it, did we?"

"Well—?" He was loath to admit too much either way— "After we sold that collar last night to that Braithwaite woman, I said to myself maybe we'll do pretty well with 'em!"

"I'm so glad!" She was suddenly happy. The tired look had left her face.

"I'll do up the dresses right now and you can carry them to the express office on the way home. They'll go out to-night and be there Monday morning."

"All right," he assented. "But hurry up with 'em. It's supper-time."

She did them up swiftly. Aaron stopped at the express office as they went by. She walked on slowly waiting for him to overtake her.

The expressman filled in the receipt and held his pencil——

"What value?" he asked. Aaron expanded.

"Put it down seventy-five," he said carelessly.

"You're doing a big business up to your place," said the man jotting it down.

"Yes," said Aaron. "We're branching out a little. Wake *you* up some if we keep on, won't it? Make lively business for express!" He chuckled.

"You can't make things too lively for me!" said the man. "I like a town with some hum to it myself— Darned dead hole this is!" Aaron stared.

"Good-night," he said curtly.

He hurried on and overtook Isabel. He was breathing a little fast——

"I believe I'll put in some men's things next week," he said carelessly. "We might do a little trade in 'em."

"It's a good idea!" said Isabel. "Shall I order them to-night?"

"Yes—you might," assented Aaron. "No harm in seeing what we can do."

XXXIII

THE next week a letter came from Dart and Company asking Miss Merton to call at their store the next time she happened to be in Boston. A card was enclosed for presentation. It bore the name of James Murphy.

She replied with a new order for goods and the explanation that she had never been in Boston and was not likely to go there except on special business.

James Murphy read the letter with approval. He instructed his stenographer— "Make it a date. Tell her to come down at our expense."

The reply came promptly. She was very sorry she was not free to be away on the date mentioned. She enclosed several samples of silk from the mill-room asking for neckties to match the samples—also any accessories for women's wear that harmonized with these colors.

The order included dancing slippers and pumps. Isabel had been studying feet, jotting down dimensions. She wrote the order with a vision of feet dancing in light accord, blue socks and mauve and gray keeping time to the music—and neckties to match.

She finished the order happily and signed it, remaining theirs very truly.

This was John Berwick's customary way of remaining. It seemed to Isabel satisfactory.

James Murphy filed the letter and made a note. He might be in the neighborhood of Hanover sometime. He should certainly stop off and see this young woman who was too busy to attend to anything but business.

The order for neckties was duly filled. Goods to match the samples of silk were selected and despatched.

They created a stir when they arrived in Hanover.

Young men hovered morning and evening about the window of Aaron Merton's store. Then they went in and bought. . . . Seconds in socks were in demand. There was an anxious season of matching up. Young men hurried from the mill at the closing whistle with a pair of seconds tucked under one arm or protruding from a side pocket—on the run to catch daylight to match colors.

"You've got to get a move on if you live in this town!" they said to Aaron over the counter as he fussed and laid out his stock and advised them in nice discrimination of color.

In time there were heavy curtains at the windows of the back-room and a lamp in readiness—for evening colors.

But this was later, much later—when Hanover had its new hall and a high-priced victrola and a piano—owned by the young people of the town—and when the old routine of eating supper, hanging about the

streets awhile or going to the movies and to bed, had given way to the new social life of the town. . . . dancing, singing, acting in amateur plays, wrestling, high-jumping and vaulting—free play for mind and body and the new quickened sense of oneness that came to them. . . . Alone they had moved aimlessly, half-dead, it seemed to them now looking back. Together they were caught up into swift-pulsing life. And the new pulse beat through them all—young and old, the stupid and the clever, good and bad, men, women, and children—no one seemed too humble or too insignificant to be included when Hanover came alive. . . . But this was far ahead, hidden in the veiling mists of the future, when Isabel wrote her order to Dart and Company asking for neckties to match samples of waste silk.

The morning the neckties arrived she found Aaron filling a large basket from the shelves behind the counter. His countenance was inscrutable.

“I’m dumping out these drugs,” he explained casually. “So much stuff lying round—you can’t hear yourself think!”

The mortar and pestle still remained on the dingy sign outside the door. But Merton’s drug-store passed out of existence.

Aaron, who had lounged and gossiped and fuddled himself with drink because he was “bored to death,” took hold of the business with a zest that bewildered Isabel watching him. . . . To her the selling of the dresses and neckties was incidental, a means to an end that glimmered always faintly ahead and

lured her on. To Aaron it seemed to become a kind of religious rite.

She wanted the girls to have pretty clothes because the clothes made them happy. They were more alive in them—more themselves. And the more they wore them, the more alive they became—as if something inside them were asleep and must be touched from without to wake it. . . . She did not think these things or know they were in her mind. She only went on obeying the force that compelled her. She no longer shrank from it. She was learning to obey. . . . But sometimes when she saw what this force that was guiding her, evoked—she held her breath before it.

Aaron regarded the selling of the neckties as an end in itself. To buy goods and arrange them attractively in the case, to sell them next day and buy more—this seemed to fill him with competent joy. After the first few times Isabel did not concern herself with the orders. Aaron took entire charge of the store.

He was perhaps a little jealous of encroachment on his power. He seemed to wake in the morning with new devices for trade humming in his head and he went to bed to dreams of business achieved.

The outlying fringe of Greeks and Poles had from the first attracted him. He had never quite accepted the return of the two dresses to Dart and Company. He referred to it now and then regretfully——

"We could 'a' sold 'em easy!" he would recall to her.

"Yes. . . . I know we could."

"Well—why didn't you?"

"I've told you—I don't know. It wasn't what I was after, not then."

"Well, it's what I'm after! And I'm getting it! There's a good deal of money made on those farms!"

The foreigners flocked to his store—at first the girls and women, and then the men. And he stocked his shelves to tempt them in.

There had always been a cleavage in Hanover between the mill-hands and the farms. Some of the men employed in the works were foreigners, but none of the girls. John Berwick in the early days had made one or two experiments—putting in a Greek or Polish girl when they were short of hands. But it always encountered opposition. . . . The girls of the best families in Hanover were willing to work in the mill. There was no stigma attached to it so long as they were all together and could keep to themselves. They liked the work. . . . But with the coming of a foreign girl the spirit of disturbance entered the works. They did not strike. They apparently took no notice of the new-comer. But accidents occurred and delays. All through the mill—even in the men's department, there was trouble. . . . Not till the alien element was removed did threads cease to snarl and patterns go wrong.

John Berwick decided the game was not worth the

candle as a matter of profit and loss. He could get the foreigners cheaper, but he could not keep them cheaper.

So the Greeks and Poles remained on the fringe of Hanover. They furnished vegetables, eggs and meat to the town. They took their money in exchange and returned with it to the farms. The money was either hoarded or invested in new tools and more land. They lived on incredibly little.

Until Aaron Merton's store threw temptation in their way, they had lived hard-working, thrifty, starved lives. . . . Perhaps old Grundiles' daughter in her finery touched the slumbering spring of beauty and desire in them.

They hovered about Aaron's window as flies round a honey-pot. And Aaron's store of honey was inexhaustible.

Now and then the young girls wore their new finery into town. But there was no communication between them and the town-girls.

Once or twice Isabel saw the dark glancing faces peering in the engine-house door at the dancers and she turned away thoughtful.

Then one evening Panyiota Grundiles approached the door boldly. She did not come as a suppliant for favors.

They were charging a small admission fee, saving the money for the new hall already planned. And Panyiota laid her dime on the counter and passed in. She was wearing the dress bought at Merton's store. Her head was held high. Her glance swept

the room—as if a queen from a foreign realm entered and gazed at them.

Groups fell back and stared. The hive buzzed—angry whirring sounded dimly. . . . The girl regarded them unmoved. She stationed herself with her back to the wall and from her height she overlooked them carelessly.

One or two couples took the floor. Silk stockings and neckties to match moved to the music—but languidly and without interest, a little self-consciously. . . . The room centred in the tall flashing figure, upright against the wall—a menace to the hive!

Then Isabel crossed swiftly. She did not take time to think. She dared not think. She held out her hands to the girl—

“Would you like to dance?” she asked.

The girl dropped an eye to her. For a minute it pierced her boldly. Then it faltered. The haughtiness in the face softened and drew back.

“I like it,” she said simply. “I no dance.” Her voice was musical and rich. The glow in her face pulsed with life. The face grew a little wistful it seemed to Isabel watching it.

“Come!” She held out her hands and the girl moved toward her, drawn by an unseen force.

The two figures were nearly of a height. They stood in the centre of the room—one dark and forbidding, the other with the curious inner light that seemed to radiate and surround her.

From the edges of the room faces gazed at them hostilely.

XXXIV

THE next night they held a meeting to thresh it out. The dance was given up. It was tacitly understood there would be no more dances till the question was decided. . . . No one was willing to admit the Greek girl, but no one saw a way to make the dances private.

Isabel did not take part in the discussion. She sat a little to one side, her clear eyes watching the conflict.

Sometimes they turned a little toward her. Then they looked quickly away. She had betrayed them! . . . The fierce instinct of exclusion was fighting for its life. If these barbarians, these Greeks and Polanders were let in, they would destroy all that tradition had established and held sacred. They would overrun and change the life of the town. Their young men and maidens would mingle with those of New England blood. They would intermarry. Racial characteristics would be swept away—annihilation follow. . . .

They did not know that these thoughts were behind them, in their blood and bones, merging in the discussion, urging them on—to cruelty if need be. They were only firmly intent on excluding Panyiota Grundiles. The Greeks and Poles must be kept out of the dances in the old engine-house.

A week went by without solution.

"It seems to me I just *must* dance!" Millie Matoon took a few flitting steps. They were standing by the fence at noon-time. The warm sun shone down on them. A little breeze blew across by the fence.

"*Can't* we have a dance, Isabel—please!" said Millie. She put a coaxing arm around her and hugged her.

"Why, of course!" laughed Isabel. "Who's hindering you?"

"To-night?"

"Why not?"

Millie hugged her again. She danced a few steps. She drew back on a thought—

"Will you come?" she asked severely. Isabel shook her head.

"Can't."

Millie's face fell. "Just because of that Panyiota-girl!" she said vengefully. "You're mad because we won't let her in!"

"No." Isabel laid a hand on her arm. "It isn't Panyiota. It's more than Pannie—bigger. . . . We've got to decide sometime. We might as well have it out—now we've begun."

"We won't ever decide," said Millie plaintively. "Nobody'll give in!"

"Perhaps we won't have to give in," said Isabel smiling. "Perhaps some one will find a way out!"

That night they held another meeting.

There were recriminations, threats of withdrawal if something were not done to bar out the foreigners.

They must agree on some policy of exclusion and agree to stand by each other in carrying it out.

And throughout all the discussion one thought was vividly present to them. No one mentioned it—but it was the loudest thing said. . . . If Isabel was going to be silly and dance with the Greeks and Poles—as if she had known them all her life—there was no use trying to keep them out or do anything about it!

They saw themselves swept in the wake of her iconoclasm. They dreaded and resented it. . . . But back of the dread and resentment something deeper stirred and troubled them—the knowledge of American youth that all men are born free and equal. They knew it and chafed under it.

They held another meeting. John Sampson got up.

“Nobody knows what Bel Merton thinks. She hasn’t said anything!”

He sat down. The meeting was relieved—John had brought things to a focus.

“Go on, Bel!”

“Tell us what you think!”

She shook her head. But they faced her, determined. Let her have this thing out if she wanted to!

She got up slowly.

“I don’t believe I need to say anything. You all know what I *did*. I danced with Pannie.”

“That’s the whole row!” muttered some one.

Bel nodded. “Yes—that’s the whole row.” She said it quietly. She stood a minute.

"Why don't you want me to dance with her?"

"It's the whole gang!" they said swiftly. "The hall isn't big enough." . . . "They'd overrun the place." . . . "You couldn't keep 'em out—if you let one in!"

"Smells!" said a voice faintly. They all laughed, a little ashamed.

Isabel waited for it to subside. It had cleared the air.

"No," she said firmly. "You're wrong. They won't crowd us out. They may not even come. They dislike us as much as we do them."

They stared with incredulous lifted shoulders.

"It's true!" she returned. "They won't force themselves. . . . We may have to coax them in." She smiled.

Ironic groans met it.

"No. You're wrong!" she said again quietly. "Try it and see!"

They were silent, unconvinced.

"Did they ever try to crowd in?" she asked.

"Look at that Panyiota Grundiles the other night—couldn't keep her out! Nobody could!"

"Yes, Pannie is different," admitted Isabel. She stood looking down, thoughts flitting in her face. "Pannie is—different," she said slowly. "She's big and—and—seeking. She *had* to come! Couldn't you see it—the way she looked at us? Pannie's one of those people that don't go with the crowd— "She's . . .

She paused, searching a word. . . . "She's a kind

of *herald*, I guess!" She said it slowly and wistfully and looked at them.

"She's a hussy!" muttered Herbert Matoon.

"No!" Isabel turned sharply. "You've no right to say that. I've danced with her and I know! You've no right to say it!"

"Have you?" she insisted. She faced him steadily, as a man might.

There was quick silence in the room——

"No." He flushed a clear red.

"I take that back!" He said slowly.

"All right!" she nodded. She turned to them.

"Pannie isn't like the rest of us. She wants to see new things—know about them. There isn't anything in the world she wouldn't do—if she wanted to—not anything!" she repeated significantly.

The room was hushed——

"If she does come to us we've got to take good care of her——" she went on quietly. "Not let any harm come to her. We can't have her go back to her own people with anything wrong done."

The girls stirred subtly. Something had been said that they responded to. They drew a little together.

The room was silent a minute. There had never been plain speaking in Hanover. It was not the fashion, but it did not occur to them that Isabel had said anything unusual. They held it a moment thoughtfully.

Frank Deane in the back of the room stood up,

his hands on the back of the chair in front of him. If he had been his own grandfather he would have stood in much the same position in the New England prayer-meeting and testified to the glory of God, or his own unworthiness.

"There won't any harm come to Pannie—not from *this* crowd—" he said slowly, "not any more than if she was one of our sisters! . . . If she comes we'll treat her square!" He paused, and the room stirred assent. . . .

"But that's the whole question—!" he threw out.

"Is she going to come?— Are we going to let her come—and all the rest of 'em?" he added significantly. "That's what we're talking about—and we ought to keep to the question."

Isabel nodded approval.

"Yes. That's the question," she said. Then she stood a minute.

"I'd thought of a way we *might* do——"

A breath of relief stole through the room. They relaxed. They settled back a little more comfortably. The aggressiveness waited on her words.

"It doesn't settle it, one way—and another way it does," she went on slowly.

"What we're all afraid of isn't anything that *has* happened or is going to happen, right off. It's something we don't even know ever will happen. Only—we're afraid of it. . . . We're afraid we're going to be afraid!"

Somebody chuckled.

A laugh went through the room.

“Why not just go along the way we are now, the way we’ve been going—and *see* if anything happens! . . . If anything does happen—anything unpleasant—we can call a meeting any time, any one can call it and do something about it. . . . Then we’ll know what we’re afraid of—not just a bogey in the dark.” She sat down.

There was no more discussion. They laughed and talked a little and broke up into groups. Some one started the victrola and they danced a while. Then they put out the lights and went home.

The big engine doors stood open. Any one who paid his dime could come in and dance.

But no one came—except Panyiota.

They danced with her as with the others, showing no difference of feeling. . . . They were not even patronizingly kind to her. She was a beautiful dancer and they liked to dance with her. They almost forgot she did not belong there.

After a time she brought another girl—but no more.

Then one night a young man appeared, a Pole. He was brought in by Frank Deane who saw him near the door and asked him in. He stood by the victrola, watching the dance with dark shining eyes. . . . Frank Deane introduced him to his sister and she introduced him to another girl.

There were finally several dark faces among the dancers on the floor and these foreigners danced with the grace and abandon of the older simpler nations.

They made a grateful element in the artificial staccato movement of the modern dance.

No one was afraid of them.

They came in and were effaced. They blended into the whole.

No one called a meeting to crowd them out.

XXXV

THERE were two outlanders who found admission to the old engine-house less easy.

John Junior and Ellen Braithwaite both approached Isabel, seeking permission to come.

"I'll behave!" said John Junior. She shook her head.

"You'd behave too well!"

"It isn't fair!" he complained. "It's the one good time in this town—and you shut me out——"

"I don't shut you out!"

"Well—I came to ask your advice——"

"And I advise you not to come—not yet awhile." She nodded. "You don't belong!" she added.

"I do!"

She looked at him shrewdly.

"Then prove it!" she said. She walked away.

John Junior studied it. He took to haunting Aaron Merton's store. He bought neckties to last a lifetime. His stock of handkerchiefs accumulated. Some of them he bestowed on John Senior. Some he kept in the drawer and some he used.

When other young men were in the store he consulted them about the color of neckties or eccentricities in style. They fell to walking down the street with him as they came out. At noon he stopped sometimes for duck-on-the-rock or to catch the ball and throw it back once or twice before he went on.

Perhaps because he was not trying to do them good, but was seeking desperately for something they had that he wanted, he made rapid progress with them. They forgot to be secretive. . . . He had known instinctively that the trouble would not be with the girls, but with the men. The girls were more complex. They would be more hospitable. They could change a fashion overnight and flaunt it proudly next morning. But the men with their frock coats and sack coats and trousers—varied by hardly a breadth's line from year to year, with the little sword-belt buttons still clinging to their backs—from the days of knighthood—the men were the real conservatives, the hostile force he must reckon with if he would gain admittance to the engine-house.

He came in carelessly one night with two of them whom he had encountered in Aaron's store. They were all talking—they hardly noticed that he entered the engine-house with them. The dance was in full swing. John Junior sought a partner—and then another. The loneliness of Hanover fell from him. . . . He resolved to bring John Senior. There was a fringe of older men and women along the wall—the women knitting and talking as they looked on. Some of them danced. He knew John Senior would dance. It would do him good.

He saw Mrs. Merton and went across to speak to her. She looked up placidly from her knitting.

"Yes, Bel brought me," she said. "She kep' at me till I said I'd come. Yes, it's real pleasant!" She looked happily over her needles at the dancers.

The needles kept time to the music. There was a little flush in her face.

Isabel came up. He looked at her victoriously.

"I'm here!" he said.

"Yes— Do you want to dance with me?"

"Why, Bel!" said her mother reprovingly. Isabel laughed.

"Oh, he has to wait to be asked. He knows his place."

He placed an arm about her and they moved toward the centre of the floor. Mrs. Merton's eyes followed them. Her needles kept time.

When Isabel came back to her with a little flushed smile, she nodded approvingly.

"You two dance nice together!" Her knitting lay in her lap. She was rubbing the reddened knuckles gently. There was a little line between her eyes. Isabel glanced at the hands sharply.

"Do they hurt you again?"

"Kind of," admitted her mother.

"It's the washing!" said Isabel quickly. "You must not do it again."

"I do'no's it's the washing. I've always done washing."

"But you haven't always been as old as you are now!"

"I'm not so awful old!" returned Mrs. Merton dryly.

"Of course not. Don't be silly!" Isabel sat down by her putting a hand over the reddened ones.

"It's time they had a rest!" she said. She patted

them. Their eyes followed the dancing figures contentedly. The music ran through them. Isabel hummed it softly.

"I'm going to see if we can't get Mrs. Atkins."

"I asked her," said her mother.

Isabel turned. "Will she?"

"No. She's got more promised a-ready than she can do. Everybody's after her."

"Yes, I guess that's so. . . . And you can't get a Greek or Pole?"

Her mother shook her head. "Not for love or money. They'd rather go stramming round the lots—doing men's work!" She said it with mild scorn. She had the New Englander's contempt for any woman who worked out-of-doors.

"I don't blame them," commented Isabel.

"Well!" It was decisive. "You're not going to do it any more. That's certain. Look at those hands! No wonder they hurt you!"

Mrs. Merton concealed them almost guiltily. "I don't see why they get so!" she murmured.

"We'll put cold cream on to-night. Perhaps that will help. And next week I'm going to do the washing myself."

"But you can't!" protested her mother.

"Of course I can. I know how to wash, as well as you do."

"But you don't have time—not mornings. I've never had my clothes stringing along out after dark. It seems shiftless!"

"Don't you worry, mother. It just means get-

ting up a little earlier in the morning. That's all."

John Junior came up again and she moved away with him. Mrs. Merton sat watching them. The little line disappeared from between her eyes. Jimmie Merton sliding across the floor, landed in the chair beside her——

"Hello, ma!"

"Where'd *you* come from?"

"The store," contentedly. "Dad's coming pretty soon. He said I could stay till he comes along." His eyes followed the light-moving figures.

"Bel dances nice, don't she?" he said admiringly.

"Yes." The mother's eyes followed her.

"I like to watch 'em!" said the boy. "It makes you kind o' happy!"

"Yes," she assented. "It's nice to see 'em. They dance real nice together."

XXXVI

THE next Monday Isabel got up at four. At half-past six the washing was on the line, and at eight o'clock she was at the office as usual.

"Your wash looks real good!" her mother said as she left the house. "They're nice and white!"

All the way to the office the little glow of praise remained with her. . . . She was not tired. The washing had exhilarated her. And hanging out the clothes in the fresh half-light with the birds singing and the dew glinting everywhere and the fresh earthy smells stealing up to her, she had a sense of wantedness, a nearness to life that made her strangely happy. . . . And then suddenly out of the happiness a curious little thought had come glowing to her. She stared at it, bewildered, and gave a quick laugh.

It was absurd!

But it came back and remained with her. It followed her into the office.

She looked about the square white room—at the window with the morning sun pouring in, and her machine waiting under its cover.

She turned the thought in her mind—looking at it more closely, still bewildered, and a little incredulous. . . . Through the day it followed her and it came between her and John Senior's dictation. She made blunders. She asked— "What?"

John Senior glanced up sharply. Bel was not herself this morning. . . . He looked again. She was not ill—that was certain. She was the picture of health.

Little vibrant waves spread from her pencil.

John Senior did not call them vibrant waves, but he felt them hitting against him as they danced in the room.

His face was thoughtful. He liked Bel to be happy—but not too happy! He wondered where John Junior was.

He got up.

“There’s enough to keep you busy till I come back.” He nodded to the notes.

He was uneasy. He had not kept an eye on John Junior as he meant to the last few weeks. The oil-deal had absorbed him—taken up his time. And he had thought John Junior was busy with poetry. . . . But it wasn’t poetry that made Isabel look like a picture and get half her words wrong. . . . When Isabel asked over, it was time to wake up.

He opened John Junior’s door without knocking.

The young man sitting at his desk thrust the paper into a drawer and turned—

“Oh! Hello, father— Come in.”

John Senior had not been in his son’s room for months. He glanced about him, a little puzzled—What was wrong?

“Where are your curtains and other truck?” he asked.

"In the closet on the floor," said John. "At least I put them there. Maybe somebody's cleaned it up." He smiled cheerfully.

"That's good!" said John Senior.

"Like it better?"

"More like business!" said his father. "What you doing?"

"Oh—some poetry—foolishness probably!"

John Senior's face relaxed. In poetry was safety. At least that was his belief. A young man peacefully occupied with poetry was not likely to steal or murder—or fall in love.

"Seen Bel lately?" he asked. This was John Senior's idea of diplomacy. If he had been dealing in wheat he would carefully have avoided all mention of crops or growing things. He would have approached the subject by a long and circuitous path. He would have used finesse. But in dealing with John Junior he sometimes lost his bearings. Besides, John was writing poetry—and safe for the present.

John Senior would chat a few minutes and get back to work. He beamed on his son.

The young man was making little marks on the blotter on his desk. His face was thoughtful. His father surveyed him affectionately. The room was full of quiet happiness.

John Junior looked up.

"I am going to marry Isabel," he announced.

John Senior jumped. The bubble of peace was punctured. He blew a sigh.

"Dear-dear!" He said it almost peevishly. "I thought you wouldn't!"

"That I—wouldn't—?" John Junior turned a puzzled look.

"Wouldn't want to— Yes! Dear-dear!" John Senior sighed again.

"Well, I do—want to. I'm going to." He smiled and John Senior seeing the smile lost heart.

"I've wanted to a long time—all my life, I guess," went on John Junior, "without knowing. I did not know—till lately." He was looking out of the window. His soul was in a shining place. John Senior was shut out.

John Senior circled about the place hopefully, but there was no opening. He moistened his lips. They closed firmly.

"You can't do it!" he said. "I won't have it."

John Junior darted from his circle. He leaped over. He was close to John Senior now—in his world, and glaring at him.

"Why not?— What do you mean?"

John Senior moistened his lips again. He looked about him. Things were worse than he thought—much worse.

"Well—" He hesitated. "I—I can't spare her!"

John Junior laughed out—in sheer happiness.

"You will have to spare her, dad!" He said it kindly. "I'll give you one month—not another day—to get a new secretary."

John Senior looked at him and his eyes narrowed.

They might have been contemplating a deal in wheat——

“Has she said she’ll have you?”

“I haven’t asked her. I wanted to talk with you first. . . . Of course I haven’t anything but what you give me.” The words had a flick of hardness. But they flashed to a quick smile. “I wanted you to know. I’ve been meaning to tell you. . . . Once or twice I thought you *did* guess.” He glanced at his father half-shyly with a smile.

John Senior shook his head sombrely. “No, I didn’t guess things had gone this far—or I’d ’a’ said something. . . . Of course I knew you liked Bel——”

“She is divine!” said John Junior softly.

The older man stirred uneasily. The memories of life awoke.

“Dear-dear!” was all he said. He wiped his brow.

“Bel is a fine girl,” he admitted judicially. “I don’t know a smarter or nicer girl anywhere than Bel. But——” He held out an impressive hand.

“She isn’t the one for *you* to marry!”

“You think I’m not good enough for her,” said John quickly. “Of course I’m not— Nobody is! Nobody could be. But I want to surround her—with beautiful things. . . . I want to give her the chance to be herself!” He said it softly.

“She’s herself, all right!” said the senior curtly.

“No! You don’t know her—her real self—what she is capable of. None of us know her. She

doesn't know herself. . . . Some days I feel as if she were inexhaustible—a mine of wealth! Undreamed power in her—all the green things in the forests of the earth. Everything is in her—waiting!”

This was sheer poetry of course. But John Senior's eyes narrowed again. He had suddenly a vision of his oil-wells bubbling up—crude and sticky and dirty and rich—*his* oil-wells!

He could not count the dollars they were flowing out to him—spouting in the air. . . . He leaned forward.

“See here, Johnnie!” He touched his knee. “I think as much of Bel as you do—enough sight more maybe. I know what she's worth—better'n you do. I'll never get another secretary to match her—Never!”

It came over him suddenly. “Why, she understands a man!” He said quickly. He sat up.

“When I say ‘gol-durn-you,’ meaning ‘hurry up, please,’ she gets it right—first time. I don't have to keep saying it over and over—a dozen times for her to get the idea!”

He sighed again. “That's the kind she is and nobody knows it better'n I do. But—” He held up his hand. “I'm going to tell you something, John.”

He hesitated. He had intended to wait till things were a little further along. He had signed the option and given security—good security too— But if they pressed him. . . . Then the oil gushed forth and swept him along on its tide, triumphant—

“We are rich, John!” he said solemnly.

John Junior stared a little. "Of course we're rich! But it doesn't matter that Bel is poor— We have enough for us all—enough to do as we please, haven't we?"

"We have too much—to do as we please," said his father. His voice sank to an awed note——

"We shall have millions, John. I don't know how many and its spouting all the time, higher and higher! We've got to live up to it!" He rose from his chair. "We've got to live high!" he said. He seemed to see their vastness spouting.

John Junior was looking at him curiously——

"What do you mean, dad?"

"Just what I say!" John Berwick paced a few steps on the Wilton rug. "I've made an investment— The whole deal isn't finished. But we own a claim of the best oil-land in Kansas. Right close to, the wells are running to-day—spouting in the air—enormous!" He spread his hands.

"It's landed us on top, John. You've got to choose a wife that's on top—knows how to sit on top—walk on top, eat on top!"

He waved his arms and gesticulated—and came to earth.

"That Miss Braithwaite, now, is something the kind I mean," he said craftily. "She makes you feel she's always had things—expects to have 'em, right along. No airs about it! She don't lift a finger hardly, but you know you've got to have things done for her and done right—or there'll be a rumpus! . . . No, not rumpus——" He paused swiftly.

"Nothing so crude as a rumpus," he said thoughtfully.

"You just wouldn't be there— She wouldn't see you— She'd walk right on and over you and not know you're there!" he chuckled.

John Junior woke from his daze—

"Yes— I know what you mean about Ellen Braithwaite, I've felt it—"

"You have?" It was as if John Senior said—

"Bless you, my son!"

John Junior nodded with a smile.

"I felt it so strong at one time that it swerved me away from Isabel—for a little while. . . . Ellen Braithwaite is complex and beautiful!"

"She is!— She is!" said John Senior.

"And finished!" said John Junior. "So finished she keeps you guessing all the time what she means—and perhaps she doesn't mean—"

He broke off and darted to the closet across the room. He plunged in. His voice came back dimly—

"She's here somewhere!" he said.

He reappeared a little ruffled with a large frame. He set it on the floor against the wall where the sun shone full on the Mona Lisa face.

"There!" he said. "There she is!"

John Senior stood with his hands in his pockets looking down at the enigmatic smile. He tilted back and forth on his toes happily.

"That's her!" he said. "I always liked her!" He studied the sufficient face.

"*She'd* spend your money, wouldn't she? And not turn a hair!" He gave a sigh of satisfaction and glanced at his son.

"That's what I mean!" said John Junior soberly.

He took the portrait in his two hands and returned it to the closet. He shut the door firmly.

"That's where I've put her!" he said. . . . "I found out one day that Isabel made me alive—my heart went bubbling and singing about her. . . . Oh, father— It's no use!" He flung out his hand whimsically.

John Senior took it and stood looking at him.

"See here, Johnnie—I don't ask you to give Bel up forever—I know what you mean about that bubbling and singing. . . . Good Lord, I guess I do! . . . All I ask is 't you should wait a spell. . . . Don't do anything sudden. That's all I ask."

"All right, father— But not too long! You've got to play fair!"

John Senior patted the hand.

"No—no!— I don't ask you to wait forever."

"I've got a deal on hand—and I've got to go steady, keep a level head. Bel helps—you've no idea how she helps a man."

"Haven't I?" said John softly.

"They're after me," said John Senior. "They'll knife me—if they can. You just give me time, Johnnie!"

"All right, dad!— Only hurry up your deal!"

John Berwick had never heard of Quintus Fabius

Maximus Verrochus—but as a man of business he knew the policy of delay——

“I might kind o’ sound Miss Braithwaite,” he suggested.

“Never!” John laughed. “She doesn’t know I exist. She’s in love with some one else——”

His father turned sharply.

“What do you mean!”

“Why, she’s in love with Isabel—the way we all are!” said John, smiling in his assured happiness.

“No one can help loving Isabel!”

“Humph!” said John Senior. He sighed. He left the room.

John Junior’s glance followed.

“No one can help loving Isabel!” he repeated softly and happily—as if it were a little chant—

“No one can help——”

John Senior’s head popped in the door.

John Junior had taken a paper from the drawer of his desk and was absorbed in it.

John Senior closed the door and tiptoed softly away.

He would have been vastly astonished had he looked over John Junior’s shoulder and discovered that the title of the poem was “The Silk-Mill,” and still more astonished, had he seen that it was all about a young girl with a quiet face, who seemed none the less to be going at an extraordinary rate of speed inside—not so much the sleep of a spinning top, as the noiseless hum of a high-powered dynamo—if one might judge from the poem.

It was perhaps as well John Senior did not read the poem. He had accepted his position as father of a poet without flinching. But in the present state of stress he was in no mood to discover himself also the father of a symbolist.

XXXVII

HE did not glance at the two bent heads typing swiftly in the outer office as he went through to his own room and closed the door.

“Grouch!” murmured Fannie inaudibly to her machine.

Isabel did not look up. She was busy with copy. She had nearly finished. She wondered whether John Senior was ready to dictate again.

John Senior behind the closed door rolled all the window shades to the top and sat down. He plunged his hand into his pockets and stretched his legs. His absent gaze regarded the extended toes. The toes remained inert. . . . After a minute they wiggled a little and worked back and forth. Then they moved rapidly—and stopped short—and went on in slow impatient jerks. . . .

Just what was Braithwaite up to now?— Or was it Braithwaite? . . . There was nothing to lay your finger on—but the attacks on his oil-securities were driving him to the wall. He must hurry up the oil-deal— And it was not safe to hurry it. He would spill all the beans if he hurried. . . . All he needed was time to sell part of the claim—a very small part, and retain his eighth-interest. Then he would snap his fingers at the bunch!

The toes worked rapidly. . . .

The money from the sale would cover his securities—all of them and leave him a margin to run on. . . . They were determined he should not have time.

He remained sunk in his chair, staring at it—that was Braithwaite's hand! He had not a doubt of it—Braithwaite was vice-president of the First National Bank in Camden, and the First National held securities. They had not pressed him yet—but it was getting narrowed down to the First National.

Braithwaite had failed with Moulton—just too late with Moulton! John Senior chuckled comfortably—and he would fail this time if he could hold steady and stave them off— They didn't know the parties who were interested in buying. . . . If they got hold of that—! He blew a quick sigh and drew in his feet. . . . If they got hold of that! . . . He saw the game as clearly as if their cards were laid on the table before him and he smiled at it grimly. If they could find out these other parties that were interested in buying and could make a deal with them to hold off long enough—they would have him! Then they could squeeze his securities one after another—make him cover till he had nothing left to cover with . . . nothing but a share in the oil-field—a good big slice they would consent to take when it came to that!

He looked at it grimly. . . . Well, it should not come to that! He thrust out his toes again and worked them thoughtfully— It would not come to that—not if he kept his hand steady and played

the game. They hadn't got him yet—not by a long shot! There was still the mill and the house. And the deal would go through all right if he gave the parties time. The least sign of hurry would scare them off— Time was what he wanted—time and a cool head. . . . His toes ceased to work. He came slowly back to the office. He blinked at it gratefully. . . . Lucky, John told him about Bel this morning. He couldn't have her upset just now—getting ideas! He needed her.

He pushed the button on his desk.

He would get to work.

He looked at her approvingly as she came in. Her face had a clear soft glow—the light in her eyes seemed to well up and flood it—as the sun floods a landscape.

“Sit down!” said John Senior kindly.

He dictated and her fingers flew. She knew his mood. Behind the swift curt words he was holding himself tense. The words grew as he spoke them— He was a man in a trance. . . . If she broke the mood by word or gesture he could not recover the power that was thrusting the quick sharp sentences at her faster than her pencil could follow. Her cheeks glowed softly, her eyes shone, her breath quickened. . . . She was a part of the creative energy that was shaping the policy of John Berwick and Son. Without her John Senior would have to go slowly and grope for words and swear. She knew how Fannie dreaded her sessions with John Senior.

But now the words drove steadily on. Letter

succeeded letter without break. Almost, one grew from the other. She saw the pattern of the whole shape itself and her willingness leaped to it—and ran a little ahead and signaled to him to come on. Between them the last letter was caught in the swift-flowing curves and swirls and came to its finish.

He pushed back from his desk.

“That’s all!” he said curtly.

She drew a breath and got up. “These go in the eight-thirty, I suppose—all of them?”

He nodded with satisfaction.

“All of them.”

She looked again and hesitated. The moment was ripe. She must not lose time.

“Are you busy?” she asked.

He spread his hands. “I’ve done my day’s work.” He took out his watch and glanced at it.

“Just fifty minutes!” he remarked complacently. He glowed with approval.

She sat down. “There’s something I wanted to talk over—” She hesitated.

“Go ahead!” he encouraged.

“I want to do something different from this—” She indicated the office vaguely. She caught the sharp startled look in his face and hurried on—

“I have to!” she said swiftly.

He regarded her a minute coldly.

“More money?” he asked. She flushed.

“No. . . . At least it’s not the money. . . . I suppose there *will* be money in it—money for everybody,” she added. Her face glowed a little.

"You mean you're going to leave me?" The question was mild. She knew the volcano was quietest just before it spurted and she knew the tense look in his face.

"I have to!" she repeated firmly. "It came to me that way——"

"What way?" he interrupted harshly. She hesitated. . . .

It was not easy to bridge the gap between his wrath and her vision. . . . They seemed to be in different worlds, they breathed different air—they spoke a different language. . . . She must say something he could understand. . . .

"I like to work with you, you know," she said slowly. "I seem alive when I am taking down the things you say."

He relaxed subtly—but he watched her face. It brooded a little——

"Perhaps that is the way I learned it—from you!" she said quickly, "—being with you and getting to feel alive like that. It makes other things seem dead—as if they weren't real, you know." She glanced at him almost timidly.

He was quiet. He was looking at something that seemed to puzzle him.

He shook his head.

"So I have to do something—that takes all of me," she said as if it were the logical conclusion.

He snorted a little grimly. "I can give you more work—if that's what you want." He glanced suggestively at the notes in her hand.

But she ignored it. "It isn't that—not that kind of 'more.' I want work that no one else will do—something that needs doing and no one will do and every one will be better off if I take hold and do it."

"Humph!" said John Senior. She nodded.

"I saw it just as if it were a picture—a kind of vision or something. . . . And I've got to! . . . There's nobody except old Mrs. Atkins," she went on swiftly. "She can't begin to do it—and she doesn't do it well either. It's got to be done *well!*" She seemed to see a vision of green fields—the light of the sun-lit ranges ahead. It held her rapt and breathless.

He stared——

"You're going to help old Mrs. Atkins?" he said dryly— He waved a hand at the office, "Instead of this?"

She followed the gesture. Her face laughed.

"It's absurd, isn't it—to want to do just—washing? But I do and I'm going to!" She got up quietly.

"I'd like to begin as soon as I can. . . . You can get a good stenographer at the Commercial School in Camden. I know a girl there—a good one. And I've made out a list—" She took it from her pad and laid it beside him——

"What's that?" he asked shortly.

"A list of the girls I shall want to take with me—and girls to replace them in the mill."

His eyes dropped to it unwillingly.

"They're the Greeks!" he said quickly. "You

know the girls won't stand for that—" He caught at any straw till he could collect his wits and control the anger that flamed in him.

There was foolishness and steadiness and power in the girl that angered him beyond words. It was a battle that would need all his self-control. He made an abrupt gesture.

"Sit down, Bel. We'll go over this thing quietly. You've got a crazy notion in your head! Girls do get 'em—but I didn't think *you* would! This list you've made out is a sample of the whole thing—the foolishness of it. It's in the air! You've given me a list of names you've picked up and you say you're going to take these others— Millie and Susan and so on, and I can have these foreigners!"

"I've tried this foreigner-business—and it won't work. That shows you how foolish the whole thing is." He looked at her in fatherly kindness.

"It will work now," said Isabel. "We know these Greek girls and like them. They come to our dances. There won't be any trouble. . . . I've thought it out. I couldn't go and I couldn't take the other girls if it would really hurt the mill—but it won't. Every one will be better off."

"And my mother and the women who are not strong enough to do their washing any longer will be a good deal better off. You see it's something that *needs* doing!"

"Don't you know that *I* need you, Bel?" He was looking at her steadily, holding himself well in hand.

She shook her head. "Not the way the washing

does!" she said quickly. "Nobody wants to do that. They despise it—and shove it off on a poor half-sick woman like Mrs. Atkins. Why, it ought to be fun to do it—build up a business out of it!" Her cheeks glowed.

"But this—" She swept the office with a glance. "Any girl that's taken a course can do it!"

"I tell you they *cannot*!" he thundered. "They drive me crazy!"

She drew herself a little away. He might have been a small boy that her eyes regarded impartially and severely—

"You have no right to want to eat me up!" she said.

"Eat—!" He gasped. She nodded.

"That's all you want to do— I just give myself to the business—all of me—and some day I die—and that's all."

He had a flitting thought of John Junior. But he controlled it sternly.

"You want to be head of the business, do you?" He had a little amused sneer for her airs.

"Not *your* business!" she said with a glint that flashed to him and held itself— Then she laughed.

"How silly! You know I couldn't manage anything like Berwick's."

He waited a minute. He had one more card to play—

He motioned to her note-book. "You know what I'm trying to do, Bel. You understand what those letters mean and what I'm fighting off." His voice

grew gentle. "Nobody else in the world understands—not even John."

She stirred a little—but she did not speak.

"I want you to help—stand by me and help me win. . . . You won't be sorry," he added significantly.

He waited—but she did not speak. She seemed to be listening to the words that went on after he stopped.

"You know what the deal means to me—I shall be worth millions!" He said it almost solemnly. She lifted her eyes quietly.

"And then?" she said.

He stared.

"Then— What?" he repeated vacantly.

"After you're worth the millions! What is the good of it?"

He gasped a little and glared at her. But she was not ridiculing him. Her face was serious.

"You'll have the money," she went on. "But no one will be any better off. . . . If I help I want it to count for something——"

He made a quick gesture of scorn.

"How much?" he asked curtly.

She stared.

"How much—do you want?" he repeated. His face had a sharp look and there was keenness and contempt in the glance that swept her.

Her face flushed slowly. She did not look up. She seemed to be holding something in control—something that threatened to overcome her——

"I—did not make it clear," she said slowly. "It is not easy to tell any one, because I don't know myself. Only in flashes it comes to me—and nothing else in the world seems worth doing. . . . I did not mean what you thought—about the money." Her voice trembled and she hurried on. "I only meant the money's dead—while you make it and when you get it. . . . It can't laugh or talk—or put its arm round you and dance and make everybody happy together——"

"That's what I mean——" she said quickly, "something we're all doing *together!*"

"Profit-sharing!" he sneered. "It's a fake!"

"It's a sop!" he added angrily. "Don't I know! I could introduce it—if I was mean enough—pretend I'm doing it for *their* good!" He brought his fist down sharply on the arm of the chair. "I'd rather shut up shop! I'm in the business to make money—like everybody else! Only I'm honest and say so. A business *ought* to make money for the man that runs it and takes risks and lies awake nights over it——"

"Yes, that's what's wrong," she assented. "Everybody ought to lie awake nights."

"Humph!" he snorted. She nodded.

"Everybody—or nobody, it seems to me. . . . I'm only just beginning to see—and I can't say it very well. But it's as if a business was something alive. . . . It has to have a head—but it has to have hands and feet, too, and a heart and lungs, and they're all part of it—just as the head is—they're all alive *to-*

gether. And if the head doesn't take care of the hands and feet—" She broke off looking at it and smiling. . . .

"I suppose it's silly. But I seem to see a lovely head with its hair done up soft and shining and a beautiful hat on and veil— And the feet have thick dirty shoes, and the dress is ugly and the hands all rough and the neck scrawny!" She laughed out quickly. "That's the way a business looks to me!"

"Why shouldn't it be *all* beautiful?" She bent forward looking at him with shining eyes— "Why shouldn't we work *together*—the hands do what they can, and the lungs and the heart and the spinal column, all for themselves and all for everybody else!" She spread her hands in a quick gesture and broke off abruptly, gazing at it.

She had forgotten him. . . . She was seeing the vision that seemed worth while. . . .

He stirred uneasily. Then his face hardened. He regarded her a minute coldly. Perhaps he was seeing a vision too—a new and alien power that must be crushed if he and his kind would live.

She looked up and met his gaze steadily.

His face was hard. He was regarding her coldly.

"You better get your work out," he said. He nodded to the pad in her hand.

She flushed and got up. She looked at him and hesitated. He did not notice her. He was busy with the papers on his desk— His hand trembled a little.

"When can you spare me?" she asked quietly.

He wheeled on her——

“Spare you!” he thundered— “Now! This minute—if you want to go!— The sooner the better!” He was white with rage!

She controlled her lip.

“I will stay till the end of the month.” “I can show the new stenographer if you have her come to-morrow.”

He did not look at her. He fussed at the papers. “The stenographer will come to-morrow,” he said. “I shall not need you after to-day— I never want to see you again!”

She opened the door and went out, a little dazed.

In his office John Senior glared at the papers——

“Damn!” he said softly. “Damn-damn-damn!”

And after a minute a final flashing puff!

“Damn!”

Then the room was still.

XXXVIII

SHE finished the letters and carried them to John Senior's desk and placed them under the paper-weight.

John Senior had gone out without a glance at her.

He would be back again to sign the letters, she knew. But he might not come before she left. It was Saturday. No one worked Saturday afternoons—except John Senior.

Her face was thoughtful as she laid the letters on his desk.

He was always working, and never happy. No one knew as she did the fierce unrest that gripped him—the wild unsparing energy that drove him. . . . She knew how he would miss her. She felt in every fibre the way John Senior would miss her—The very thought was painful. . . . But the determination in her face did not relax. She cleaned her machine and oiled it. She brought the dust-cloth from the closet and dusted her desk and then John Senior's, touching each article gently as if she were saying good-by to it.

Fannie from her machine looked over once or twice, a little scowl in her gaze.

"What's all the fuss?" she asked at last, almost impatiently.

"Nothing," said Isabel tranquilly. "I'm just

putting things to rights." She would have to tell Fannie and she dreaded it. There was a coldness in the office that she found it hard to account for—Fannie, of all the girls, stood aloof from the dances in the engine-house. She came sometimes with Samuel Hodgkins. But she seemed almost intentionally to shut herself off from the social life of Hanover. On Sundays she was always in Camden, and often in the middle of the week. She had refused to join the tennis club that now had three courts and was the centre of life on Saturday afternoons. There was a small fee to pay. But it was not the fee, Isabel felt sure, that kept Fannie out . . . Comradeship in the office was a thing of the past. There had been no open break, but Fannie held her at arm's length.

Isabel watched her a little wistfully. She wished she knew why.

Fannie's name was not in the list she had given John Senior. He would at least have her left in the office.

Fannie finished her sheet and glanced at the clock——

"You're wasting a lot of time," she commented.

"Yes. . . . I want to leave everything in order." Something in the tone arrested attention. Fannie turned and stared coolly.

"What do you mean?" she asked. There was a startled note in the question.

"I'm not going to typewrite—any more," said Isabel. She carried the duster to the closet.

Fannie swung back to her machine.

"Going to be promoted, I suppose!" The words flicked a little. It used to be a joke between them—Fannie's pet grievance that Isabel was in line for promotion—the favorite in the office. But there was no humor in the words she shot out now.

She covered her machine and got up. Her face was white.

Isabel came slowly from the closet.

"I'm through in the mill," she said quietly.

Fannie looked at her slowly.

"You going to be married?" she demanded.

"No," said Isabel.

A fierce look came into the face watching her. It worked strangely——

"I suppose you're going to live with that Braithwaite woman?" she said savagely. "Be with her *all* the time! My God—how I hate her!" She sobbed it through the strange workings of her face.

"Why—Fannie!"

The girl nodded fiercely——

"I hate her—I tell you! Taking you away—making a lady of you! I hate her!" She stamped her foot. She turned away trying to conceal the face that the tears poured down.

Isabel moved to her—laughter and relief struggling and making her suddenly happy.

"Fannie!" She touched her arm. "I'm just going to open a laundry— That's all!"

"What—!" The girl gasped——

There was a long bewildered minute of silence.

"Well!— Of all the *silly* things!" said Fannie. She drew in her breath on a little sob.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she demanded sharply, "making me act like a fool!"

"I *am* telling you," said Isabel. She laughed out. They were on the old safe footing! She could have thrown her arms round Fannie and hugged her. . . . But Fannie was not the hugging kind.

She stood gazing at Isabel, belligerent—

"Who's going to be here—in the office?" she demanded. "There's no one can take *your* place!"

The awfulness of it came over her—

"Does *he* know—?" she asked, breathless.

Isabel nodded.

"He's mad?"

"A little," admitted Isabel.

"And nobody but *me* to swear at!" moaned Fannie. "I won't stay!" She threw out her hands—

"I'm going with you, Bel— You've got to take me in that laundry! You needn't think I'm going to stay here with that—" She glared fearfully at the office door— "—that fire-eater!" she breathed. "I just won't!"

"But Fannie!"

"I won't—not for nobody!" retorted Fannie.

"And you all needn't think it's all *him*!" She moved a scornful hand to the inner door and turned to her half-pleading.

"I want to be with *you*, Bel. . . . I can do laundry, as well as any one, I guess— I never tried. . . . Maybe I'll dip 'em in corn-starch and streak the

bluing— But where you go, Bel Merton, I'm going!" There was something ready to break in the piquant face gazing at her defiantly.

Isabel moved to her.

"All right, Fannie!"

She put out a hand and the girl seized it.

They stood for a moment clasping hands like two boys, confronting each other. It was a compact.

Isabel dropped the hand with a sigh.

"I don't know what he'll do!" she murmured. Fannie cast a quick look. A smile danced in her face.

"Sam Hodgkins'll come," she said. "He'd like to—and he'll be good for him!"

She moved to the telephone.

"I'll ask him right now."

There was delay in locating Samuel Hodgkins, and Isabel occupied herself in finishing the office, making it immaculate. Her ear caught only giggles from Fannie and murmurs and parts of sentences.

"Of all the cheek!" . . . "Not much!"—"Well! All right. . . . Yes—all right!" Fannie hung up breathless. She swung about in her chair.

"He'll come!" she announced. "He says he'll have the Principal recommend him when John Senior calls up." She sat with a thoughtful look, gazing at the floor.

"He was awfully funny about it!" she commented dryly. "What do you think he said?" She looked at Isabel half-doubtingly.

"Said he'd come if I'd marry him!"

Isabel laughed. "Did you say you would?"

"Yes. I said so— to get him," she added sagaciously.

"Then you will. You've got to play fair."

Fannie sighed. "I do'no'! He's an awful bother!

. . . Yes, I suppose I will!" Her face was sober.

"He's an awful nice fellow, Bel! I never told you about a lily he sent me—last Easter-time—did I?"

Isabel shook her head.

"I never told anybody—I didn't like to say anything about it some way— But he sent something with it—poetry, that let me see what he's like. . . . you wouldn't believe to look at him, the way he feels inside. . . . It's—it's kind of beautiful," she said wistfully. "Of course I'm not the way he thinks I am—no poetry about *me*!" she sighed.

"He says he won't come any other way— So I suppose I'll have to!" She was silent a minute. . . . Then her eyes twinkled.

"He's going to get an awful bump!" she said softly.

XXXIX

THE maid appeared in the doorway. "A gentleman to see you, Miss Braithwaite, in the drawing-room."

"A gentleman?" Her brow contracted a little with the near-sighted look of inquiry. "Did he give his name?"

"No, Miss. He only asked could he see you a few minutes."

Ellen Braithwaite moved reluctantly to the door and down the hall. . . . She was annoyed with the stranger who had not sent in a name, and annoyed with the maid who neglected to ask for it.

The short stout man standing with his back to the door gazing at a portrait on the opposite wall was absorbed in it.

She peered at the figure uncertainly.

It wheeled about and came toward her.

"Oh— Mr. Berwick! It's you!" She smiled and held out her hand. "I was thinking of you— only a little while ago."

"Your father well?" asked John Berwick with punctilious courtesy.

"Very well!" she replied. "Will you come into the library? I will call my father."

But John Berwick waved it aside hastily.

"I came to see you."

"On business," he added after a stately moment.

She sat down and lifted her puzzled glance to him. The near-sighted gaze seemed to disconcert him a little. He moved away a few steps and came back.

"I want to ask your hand in marriage," he said abruptly.

Her lips parted. Astonishment was in her eyes.

"Are you asking me—to marry you?" she murmured.

"No!— I'm asking for my son to marry you!" It came explosively.

"Oh!" She accepted it and sat bewildered.

"You know I am rich!" he said succinctly.

"I—have heard so."

"I'm richer than you've heard," he replied. "Richer than many people know. I have money and power. I want my son to marry a woman that knows what to do with money and power."

"You are the woman!" he said solemnly. It was as if as the representative of a princely house he presented a royal alliance for her consideration.

The glimmer of amusement in her face held itself. She looked at him vaguely.

She saw the man short, inclined to stoutness, but with a dignity that comes from unconsciousness and devotion to something greater than himself.

Two things in life were sacred to John Berwick—his money and his son. He laid them both at her feet and waited her decision.

She studied the rug. She might have been considering the proposal laid there at her feet by John

Berwick. . . . She might have been seeing something quite different from what he proposed. Her face was inscrutable.

He moved a little nearer to her.

"I don't want you to think there are difficulties that I don't know about maybe, and can't straighten out for you. You can trust me to do whatever you want done to make you happy." He spoke with simplicity and quiet courage.

"Your father has fought me pretty steadily," he went on. "But I don't bear him any grudge. Why shouldn't we join forces. You're above little things like that."

She raised her eyes.

"You're a queen!" said John Berwick. She stared——

"And your son!" she asked. "Does he want to marry me? Does he know you have come to me?"

"He knows what I want—what I think of you," he replied stoutly.

She waited a minute.

"I cannot give you an answer to-night. You have surprised me, you know."

"I did not expect an answer to-night. I only want you to consider it—and say you will not refuse to let John speak to you."

"I certainly shall not refuse—unless I see it would be futile. I must think." She rose and gave him her hand—as if she received and dismissed an embassy.

He bowed himself over it. He did not lift it to

his lips. But the respect in the gesture conveyed that he would serve her with his life—in any way she might choose to command.

He went from the room.

Her eyes followed the pudgy absurd figure with a little inscrutable smile—the smile in John Junior's closet turned with its face to the wall.

The smile was still on her lips when she entered the library and passed on to the piano in the next room and sat down. She played for half an hour weaving dreams and dissolving them under her finger-tips.

John Berwick rolling swiftly toward Hanover sat erect, a hand on either knee. Now and then he glanced from the window of the car. His face was absorbed.

He was seeing a woman—her reddish hair gathered high and the little vague inscrutable smile on her lips sitting before him, listening. . . . He was stirred to his depths— The woman and his money seemed interwoven. They belonged together— One could not think of them apart.

John Junior must get over this nonsense about Isabel!

The girl had done for herself—deserting him this way when he needed her most. . . . His glance tightened. He was done with Isabel. The sooner John Junior understood, the sooner he came to his senses—the better for him—and for everybody! The

woman's smile followed him along the smooth rolling road. . . .

It set his pulses beating.

What a woman!—for John Junior.

XL

ISABEL, left alone on the tennis-field, lingered a little. It was supper-time and she would be late if she did not hurry. But she was looking at the house in the lot adjoining the tennis courts. Presently she crossed the street and asked for the key.

It was a large old-fashioned house dating back to the early history of the town. The heirs who owned it held it for sale. They were not willing to rent and it had stood vacant for several years. It was badly out of repair, Isabel knew, but she knew that it belonged to the time of strong timbers and honest workmanship. It was just the place for the laundry. . . . She had been turning it in her mind as the tennis game went on.

She inserted the key and the creaking door swung back into the old hall.

She stepped in, turning to a big room on the right. . . . The late light coming through the dusty cobwebbed windows made her strangely happy. She wanted to sing as she went through the bare echoing rooms. . . . She could see the girls coming and going—the smell of clean suds in the air, clothes swinging on the lines outside—all the deadness of the house coming alive.

In the hall upstairs she paused. A thought danced to her through an open door. She went on to the next room and looked in——

Fannie and Samuel Hodgkins! She laughed out. All the little bare echoes caught it and sent it hurrying through the doors ajar into silent rooms. . . . She drew a quick sigh—almost of envy.

Ten minutes later she had returned the key and was walking swiftly toward home, watching the plan grow and shape in her mind—

A car came silently behind her. It stopped and Ellen Braithwaite leaned out.

“You’re coming home with me, Isabel!” she called.

She glanced at the girl’s face as she got in—at the intent look of absorption in it.

“Tired?” she asked. Isabel shook her head.

“Just thinking,” she said. “It’s been a wonderful day!”

“Wonderful!” assented Ellen. “You’re going home with me, you know— I’ve told your mother.”

“Yes—I want to go. I’ve been wanting to see you for days.”

They did not speak again. The smooth-rolling car, the soft late light, the glow in the sky and the sense of friendliness and love filled Isabel with content.

It seemed to her now that she had been moving toward this moment all her life. . . . The child in the rain-coat, with the rainbow overhead, was running to meet it. The dyed silk dress danced her toward it. Ellen Braithwaite’s love gave her courage for it. And after all it was only—doing washing!

She laughed out.

Ellen turned a slow smile.

"Well?"

"Nothing," said Isabel. "Just thinking."

When they reached the house she went through the hall to the terrace. The sky behind the greenhouses was flushed a pale rose. The twilight had a sense of waiting.

She looked about the terrace garden with a wistful glance. . . . This place was home to her—one home. There was not a flower in the beds that she did not know and love. She and Ellen had weeded and dug and transplanted for hours at a time and they had sat with earth-covered hands laughing and talking. At night they had walked here in the moonlight. The garden was home to her as the house was home. The books in the library—Ellen's music stealing through her while she read. . . .

Isabel smiled gently—looking at the dark shimmering green behind the walls of glass. She was thinking of her suspicions of Eben Braithwaite. . . . It was all so different when you came to know people and understand them a little. . . .

A step sounded on the gravel. She turned. He was coming toward her along the path. He put out a hand.

"Glad to see you!" he said smiling. He held the hand a minute. "Nell here?"

"Yes. She went to her room." She withdrew her hand. She stood looking up at him contentedly.

"Have you seen the larkspurs? They're just coming out!" He led the way along the terrace.

They passed out of sight of the windows. He stooped quickly and looked down at her.

"I was hoping you would come!" he said swiftly. Something in the tone startled her and she looked up—and then away.

"It's all different when you're here," he went on. "The very flowers are different—! Don't you see— Look at those fox-gloves!" She lifted a swift glance. He laughed happily.

"That's right, Bel! Keep looking— How sweet your eyes are!" He moved a step.

She was very still. The sky had flushed a deeper rose. The twilight was passing into rich dusk.

He took her hand gently.

"You know, Bel— I want you! You must stay here with me— Stay with the flowers! Will you?" He bent to her. She was moving back a step, looking at him curiously.

"I don't love you—do I?" she breathed.

"Well—!" He laughed out. "That's what I'm asking you!"

She waited a perplexed minute.

"Isabel!" he murmured.

"No!" She said it with decision. She shook her head.

"I don't love you. But something so curious— happened to me. I don't know what it is. . . . I think it is because you surprised me." She looked at him.

"You're a witch, Bel! That's what I meant to

do—but I didn't mean you to know it!" He laughed, a little chagrined.

She smiled. "It doesn't matter, does it. I don't love you, you see," she said tranquilly. . . . "I used to dislike you!" She raised her glance.

"I know—the night I came to Berwick's for the scarf."

"Yes—and after that. But I don't any more. . . . I'm fond of you."

His eyes were regarding her keenly.

"I'm fond of everything here!" she went on. "It is home." She looked at the fox-gloves and the larkspur, mysterious in the dim light. "It is all so beautiful!" she said softly.

The perplexity that had left her face seemed to pass to his—

"You speak as if you were saying 'no' to me!"

"Perhaps I am. I can't tell. I must wait. . . .

"But not too long!" he said quickly.

"I can make you happy, Bel. . . . And you can make me—anything you will!" A deeper note was in his voice. "I did not know—till you came. I want things I have not wanted before in all my life. Don't leave me!" He had taken her hand. She withdrew it quietly after a minute.

"I must wait," she said.

"What is it troubles you? I can teach you to love me. I know I can! You shall have everything you want!"

She looked up at him. . . . "I wonder if you

could—give it to me—I wonder?” She said it musingly.

“What is it you want? I’ve never worked in my life. But I’ll work now—to give it to you. What is it?”

“People,” she said quietly.

He stared.

“Everybody!” she nodded. “I feel as if my heart were breaking—cracking all to pieces!” She laughed. But there were tears in her eyes. “I want them— Oh, I want the whole world!” She held out her hands.

He seized them.

“You shall have it!” he murmured. “You shall have everything—people—money——”

She drew back. “No, no! You don’t understand! I don’t understand myself. But it follows me—trying to tell me. . . . And it seems so silly——!”

“What is silly?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I can’t tell you. . . . I don’t know—myself!”

She looked back along the path. “We must go in to dinner,” she said practically. “Ellen will be waiting and I’m not ready.”

He reached a hand to her. “Child!” he said.

She lifted her face and he took it in his hands.

“There isn’t any one else?” he asked.

Tears swept across the eyes and blinded them——

“Nobody——” she said. “Just the whole world!”

A tremulous smile touched her lip and she turned away——

“That’s all!” she said quietly. “Just the whole world— That’s all I want!”

XLI

AFTER dinner Eben Braithwaite withdrew. He had letters to write, he said. Isabel with her eyes on the fire dreamed a little. Ellen in the room beyond was playing gently and the music filled the fire-lit room. It fitted into the girl's mood. . . . She could be happy here, to live like this always—and she could make them happy.

The strangeness of Eben Braithwaite's love was still with her. It filled her with wonder, and a curious happiness stirred in her. . . . She had never thought about love. It always seemed to be for other girls—not for her. If she wanted love she scarcely knew it. But Eben Braithwaite's words woke something vaguely in her. . . . She had seen far back in his eyes while he spoke—and it was not the man of the world offering to protect her and care for her—but a man who needed her. . . . And there was no one else. . . . Her cheek rested on her hand and she stared into the fire. It seemed strange there should be no one else. . . . A question sped across it— She stared at it and put it away sharply. No, of course there was no one else. . . . Fannie's face tremulous and laughing flitted through the rooms of the old house. . . . Isabel stirred a little.

Eben Braithwaite was an old man—as youth counts time. But he would be kind to her—she saw it with clear dispassionate eyes. There would be

money to carry out the plans that filled her with happiness.

She knew his unfailing courtesy and gentleness and Ellen's love for him. In business, perhaps, he was shrewd and unscrupulous—but so was John Senior. She smiled a little ruefully. She had forgotten John Senior's wrath. . . . She sighed and mused again looking into the fire. . . .

No— There was no one else—and Eben Braithwaite could give her money for the dreams, comforts for her mother—money to help Jim— The fire-light danced on it. . . . There would be children of her own to love— She stirred impatiently. She stood up. She did not want children— Eben Braithwaite's children. She wanted the world! She stretched out her hands vaguely. Her face lighted to it. . . . Comradeship—life swayed her—men and women and comradeship shaping the world! She stood with head lifted, gazing at it across the dim room, a smile on her lips.

The music ceased. Ellen Braithwaite was standing in the doorway looking at her curiously. She came across.

"I knew you had stopped listening," she said. "So I stopped playing. I can always tell when you listen—you draw the music out of me!"

She was still looking at her closely.

"What are you thinking about, child?"

Isabel smiled at her wistfully.

"Just life."

"Well, stop thinking about life and think about

me. I want to ask you something—I want to go to the next engine-house dance. May I?"

"You may not!" said Isabel firmly. "I've told you— You don't belong!"

"I'll make myself belong! Try me!"

"You can't. You're different!" She looked at her slowly. "You're beautiful and—you are different," she said. "Everything would be wrong if you were there. We all swing together. It's like music——"

"I'm a discord?"

"You're different," repeated Isabel.

"Yes, I'm an idle-rich, I suppose, and there's no place for me." Isabel's face lighted.

"That's it exactly! . . . You're a great beautiful striped thing with gauzy wings. You don't belong in the hive——"

"I'd set them buzzing! . . . You're afraid. You think they would sting *me.*"

"No—only buzz. The music would stop—and go wrong. You can't come!" She said it regretfully and firmly.

"Bel! I should like to shake you!" Isabel held out her hand.

"Shake!" She said laughing.

But Ellen Braithwaite only took the hand in both hers and held it a minute. She was looking into the fire. Presently she lifted the hand and laid it against her cheek.

"I've got to find some work," she said. "I can't be shut out!"

Isabel withdrew her hand and rested it on the mantel. Her face was dancing in the firelight.

"Why not come into my laundry," she said.

"Your—*laundry!*" Isabel nodded.

"Didn't you say you can't get a pillow-case or sheet decently done up—and they ruined your linen dress!"

"They did!" murmured Ellen. She was staring at her puzzled.

She nodded again. "I'm going to change all that. I'm going to start a laundry—a good one. And you may work in it if you are very good!" She was smiling at her whimsically.

"Sit down!" said Ellen. "Talk sense!"

The plan unfolded and she listened with short-sighted quizzical smile. . . . The details had shaped themselves in Isabel's mind. She laid them before her—tubs and boilers and wringers to be borrowed or rented from the families who would not need them any longer when the washing was done outside. Clothes-pins, starch, bluing, wire for lines, and one washing-machine to be bought. It would need little money. They would share expenses and profits and put aside a fund for new equipment. The future was left to develop itself.

"We shall learn as we go," said Isabel.

"I should think so!" breathed Ellen Braithwaite. "It's a magnificent dream of suds—bubbles in the air. They'll shimmer and vanish. You'll run amuck!"

"No. Wait and see!"

"I shall not wait— I'm going in with you to help keep you from it! We'll have to have a wagon to collect and deliver— I'll run our old motor-truck—drive it myself!" She laughed out. "What fun!"

A thought crossed her face. "I shall collect the money at the same time," she said severely. "Do you make me treasurer?"

"Of course," responded Isabel. "Anything you like."

"It's done. . . . And I can go to the dances!"

"Well—after a week or two perhaps."

Ellen Braithwaite sat back smiling happily and gazing into the fire.

"How did you come to think of it?" she asked.

"Mother got rheumatism. The washing was too hard for her. Then I saw it was too hard for all the mothers. And old Mrs. Atkins just tottering from house to house. . . . It seemed foolish that we couldn't get our clothes washed decently. Even when we had money to pay for it we couldn't hire any one to do it for us.

"At first I thought of three or four combining and getting some one from outside—importing a wash-lady! And then the thing grew and it grew, like Mr. Finney's turnip! I don't believe it will ever stop growing now. Every time I peek into it there's something new sprouting up—a flat-iron or a clothes-line!"

"So you did it just—to save your mother?"

"I thought so when I began. . . . But now it

seems to me that the whole thing must have been down in my mind somewhere a long time—only I didn't know it was there. I had to have some kind of starter—to get at it. . . . You see it isn't just the washing— It is really the chance for all of us to get together—do work together, that makes me so happy."

"How many are there of you?"

"Six at first—including you!"

Ellen Braithwaite smiled and patted the hand resting on the arm of the chair.

"That's right— Including me!" she said happily. "But you don't have to take in washing to work together. You work together now, all of you at the mill."

Isabel stirred. "No! At the mill we don't work together—we work for John Senior."

"You mean he takes the money?"

"It isn't the money! I don't care about the money—though of course we can use it." She gave a dry smile.

"Yes, people do," assented Ellen.

"But in the mill we don't work *with* each other. Each one does her own work and she does it for John Senior. In the office I work for him and Fannie works for him. Even Fannie and I don't work *together*."

"You are jealous of Fannie— She's jealous!"

"No. Not that. We're good friends— At least we are now!" A thoughtful smile touched her face.

"Fannie's going in with us."

"That's good!"

"We are good friends," she went on, "and the girls in the work-room are good friends. But we all work like separate sticks." She pondered it. "I know what I mean, because I feel it when I am with the others."

"It is as if a big spirit—bigger than all of us—came in and took possession and did things. Nobody bosses, nobody seems to work hard. We just move together like one big being. . . . You remember that night we tried lifting each other up on our finger-tips—just drew in our breath and lifted, and up she went—even Sue Gleason and she weighs a hundred and eighty! . . . I've thought maybe it's something like that. Perhaps 'when two or three are gathered together in My name'." She looked at her thoughtfully.

"I see!" said Ellen. "How did you get the idea?"

"It isn't an idea. I just feel it—when we're *together*. And when I'm alone I keep wanting to be with the others."

"You are lonely and bored when you are by yourself?"

"No, not bored," she said quickly. "There are always interesting things in your head to think about and things to do. But I'm not—" She searched for the word, "—not myself, not comfortable. I feel as if my body wasn't big enough to hold me—all of me that keeps swinging up through me. . . . When I'm with the others I am bigger, quieter, happier—"

as if something kept flowing out of me into them and back into me again. As if we were all one big body. . . . I can't explain it very well, because I don't understand, but it's real—the most real thing that's ever happened to me— Sometimes I'm afraid of it, as if it would take hold of me and make me do what it wanted—as if I was born to do it and *couldn't* be just myself!" She stopped, with a little catch in her breath, gazing into the fire.

Ellen Braithwaite patted the hand lying on the arm of the chair.

"*You're* not afraid!" she said softly.

They turned. There was a sound in the hall. Eben Braithwaite stood in the doorway.

"In the dark still?" he asked. He came across to them.

"Not in the dark at all!" said Ellen. "Very much in the light! We are beginning to see things—going to start a laundry. We solicit your patronage."

He looked from one to the other smiling and testing it—

"Any one that starts a decent laundry has the blessing of heaven—and the whole community!" he said fervently. "Buttons!" He spread his hands. "Silk shirts—woollens!"

"You really mean it?" He was not looking at his daughter but at the girl beside her. Her face flushed.

"Yes—we mean it. . . . We want to do something worth while."

"Then I'm with you," he said. He saw his chance and took it.

"Tell me about it!" He sat down. He drew out a cigar— "May I smoke?"

He lighted it and cast the match at the fire—

"You will want money," he said practically. "How much?"

Isabel told him of the old house and her tentative plan. They threshed it out point by point.

"It will be simple," he said. "The First National will take a mortgage on the house for two-thirds value—and then you can have a second mortgage secured by your personal note. You will have to have it undersigned by two responsible parties. I'll be one of those— And the other— Why not have your father?" he asked.

A quick still glow was in her face.

"Would they take him?"

"He's doing a good business, isn't he?"

"Yes."

He nodded. "That's all right! I'll attend to the details if you like." He blew a whiff of smoke and puffed it away. She was silent, watching dreams in the fire. Eben Braithwaite regarded her keenly a moment. "I believe you'll put it through," he said slowly. "You have a good head for business!"

Isabel roused from her dreams, smiled—"John Senior says that too." The smile clouded. John Senior's wrath recurred. Even in her pleasure it hurt a little.

"He's terribly offended," she said.

"He knows—that you've left him?" said Braithwaite.

She nodded.

"Who's going to take your place?" There was keenness in the question.

"I don't know. Fannie's going too. There's a man she knows—from the Commercial School—he may come."

"Has Berwick engaged him?"

"No." Her face laughed. "But we knew he had to have some one good. So we tried to plan for him. He'll ask at the Commercial School and they'll probably recommend this man—Hodgkins his name is."

"I see." His face remained thoughtful.

"I'm going to deliver, you know," said Ellen. "Is the old motor-truck fit to use?" He turned to her vaguely.

"Oh— What? No." He seemed to wake from a puzzle.

"I'll have it looked after to-morrow. But I can't spare *you*, Nell—not just now. I want you."

"What for?"

"Business," he said briefly.

"Can't Carter do it?" she pleaded. "I don't want to miss the fun. And there are a dozen families—right here in Camden to get to-morrow!"

"I can't spare you," he said decisively. "Carter has to be away—a few days—a month perhaps. There's no one else I can trust. You'll have to help out. It's important, you know." He looked at her significantly and she returned the look a minute.

“Very well,” she assented. She sighed a little.

He got up. “I have some letters to finish. I ran away for a breath.”

At the door he turned back. “I’ll hurry and finish and then you play a while for us—will you?”

She nodded absently.

He disappeared and her eyes followed him reflectively.

“I’ll have to do it,” she said with a sigh. “Carter’s indispensable—and there’s no one else. But when he comes back!”

“Don’t you let anybody take my place,” she warned.

“Nobody could take your place,” laughed Isabel. “You’re like Carter—you’re indispensable.” Then her face clouded with a sigh.

She, too, had been indispensable— She did not like to think of John Senior wrestling and swearing alone.

XLII

THE beginning of the Hanover Laundry marked a new era. They used it to reckon time by.

Even families too poor to hire washing done availed themselves of chronology. And "that was before we had the Laundry" became as "that was before the flood."

Tubs, wringers, and flat-irons came showering in on it. They had only to choose out of the abundance thrust upon them. Details of the purchase of the house had been put through quickly and Aaron Merton had undersigned the note securing the second mortgage. That was perhaps the proudest moment in Isabel's life—when she signed the note and watched the signatures of Aaron Merton and Eben Braithwaite being written below it.

She was learning to depend on Eben Braithwaite. . . . A younger man would not have understood and provided for her freedom as he did. A young man would not have been wise enough or shrewd enough. . . . He gave her a sense of security and more and more she turned to him for sympathy and help.

Ellen Braithwaite was not yet free to work with them. But her father could be depended on for practical advice and for help at every point.

Only one lack hindered the completion of ar-

rangements and beginning work. The old house must be thoroughly renovated, the back-yard equipped with posts and lines and the place put in order.

There was no one but Silas Atkins to do the carpenter work for wash-benches and the digging of post-holes and stretching wire for lines. Silas was slow and old.

Isabel figured that snow would be flying before the first clothes were hung on the lines of the Hanover Laundry.

A meeting was held to consider whether they should hire men from Camden to do the work, as Eben Braithwaite advised.

"Herbert says if we'll go ahead and get things ready, they'll all come Saturday afternoon and put it through," announced Millie Matoon.

"How many of them?" asked Isabel.

"Everybody," replied Millie. "All of us that's been to the dances. Herbert says it's a lark! Only we'll have to have things ready for them."

Yes, of course. We have the posts now and wire for lines. . . . We'll need shovels and hoes and nails, wire-stretchers, lime for whitewash, brushes, pails, mops, scrubbing-brushes, clothes-baskets—" She ran off the items on her fingers.

They made out the list rapidly. Each one took responsibility for what she could manage best. The meeting was carried on in the spirit that was to characterize the whole future of the laundry.

No one directed or gave commands. Together

they attacked questions and reached conclusions—by the same process apparently that an individual follows in thinking out problems. But the common mind seemed to move more swiftly than any individual, and the impulse to carry out decisions seemed projected by the force of the whole body. There was the enthusiasm and swing of group consciousness about it.

Isabel working with them knew for the first time the full joy of being herself. The larger self played through her. The unconscious joy of dancing seemed to gather itself up and drive through to a purpose. They were alive.

On Saturday the old house hummed to it. The paper was scraped from the walls, baskets of débris carried out, bonfires made on the old garden, post-holes dug, whitewash and kalsomine prepared, wires stretched, floors washed, paint scrubbed. The whole went on with laughter and talk—and an underrunning plan that seemed to direct the work. . . . Only Isabel moving here and there was alive to the significance of what was happening among them, and even in her it was submerged in the deep still content of being with them and working happily.

Ellen Braithwaite who had brought over a hamper for supper stood a moment in the hall looking out through the door at the rear where the garden was filled with workers.

Down the stairs murmuring voices drifted to her and through the doors on either side she caught glimpses of moving figures. The place was alive.

. . . And as she watched it happily a curious fancy came to her— In and out through the changing movement Isabel's presence seemed to pass. . . . Isabel was "the life of the place," she thought. And then she saw that it was true. . . . Isabel was life!

She did not direct or guide by a preconceived ready-made plan. She flowed through like the beating of a pulse, the flashing of electric force—and they became alive!

She watched Isabel coming toward her. She understood dimly for the first time the light that seemed to radiate about her.

Isabel paused by her and they stood looking into the yard.

"You'll stay?" she said. "We're almost through."

Ellen Braithwaite shook her head. "Not tonight. I'm just beginning to see! When I come I shall float in so lightly you'll never know I'm there! I'll be a thistle-down!"

"You always are!" laughed Isabel.

Through the door they saw John Junior, his hat and coat off, lift a heavy post and drop it into its hole. A dozen shovels and feet thrust down the earth and he held it upright while they pounded it in place. He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead hastily. They were moving on to the next hole and he stuffed the handkerchief in his pocket and hurried after them.

"How good for him!" said Ellen, laughing.

But Isabel made no response. Her eyes were on the moving figure as if she saw it for the first time and wondered a little at something. . . .

"You let *him* come!" said Ellen jealously. "He doesn't 'belong' any more than I do. He's an idle-rich, but you've made a place for him!"

"He made his own place," said Isabel. "I've nothing to do with it. . . . Only—I'm just seeing it! They don't even know he's there, do they?" Her face glowed. She turned again.

Ellen Braithwaite watched her face a minute. She smiled subtly.

"Did you know John Senior asked me the other night—to marry him?" She moved a hand.

Isabel's face flashed back.

"To marry— John Senior," she gasped.

"No— Silly! . . . John Senior's son!"

"Oh . . . !" Said Isabel. She looked at it— and at the group. John Junior was again mopping his brow. They called to him with their shovels to hurry up.

"I told him I'd think about it. . . ." went on Ellen watching the disheveled figure. "Would you?"

"Think about it?"

"Marry him?"

"I'd wait till he asked me," said Isabel decisively.

"That's what I told him. . . . He's a nice boy!" she added irrelevantly.

Isabel flitted a smile to her. "He is older than you are!"

"Is he?" It was indifferent. She stood a minute

longer looking at them, a little perplexed frown between her eyes. She turned away.

"The hamper is under the stairs," she said. "I'll come for it to-morrow."

She passed out of the house. Other baskets were coming in. The mothers had prepared supper for hungry men and girls.

They unpacked the baskets on the table in the front room and set out food.

A clean smell of lime and suds pervaded the house. Fires were burning in the big fireplaces. Through the windows and doors the voices of young men came in happily. They were putting away their tools. . . . The mothers left the supper on the table and withdrew. Some one in the kitchen was making coffee. The young men at the sinks were washing hands and faces and drying them on the big towel. The girls from upstairs floated down. They had made quick toilets. . . . The dusk was coming on and candles were placed on the narrow mantels and on tables and stands. They shone faintly on the new pulsing life in the old house. . . .

After supper they sat about the fire in a circle on boxes and improvised seats. They told stories and sang and talked. . . . drawn together in the feeling of good-will and friendliness and coming life.

John Junior between two youths he had never seen until to-day had a happy comfortable sense of being, almost for the first time in his life, at home. He had never felt like this in the house on the hill.

He glanced across at Isabel. She was looking

into the fire. She seemed unconscious of the group about her.

She looked up and met his gaze. A quick flush came leaping, like a flame from the hearth, and touched her face. She looked away.

John Junior's heart went thump! and stood still. Then it bounded forward. It raced through him.

One of the young men beside him threw an arm across his shoulders. They were all singing together. . . .

XLIII

THE late March day was bleak, with a hint of rain in its grayness. But inside the Braithwaite house the reluctant spring seemed already come. A fire burned on the library hearth and flowers were everywhere, filling the rooms with light and fragrance. The flame shadows flickered beneath chairs and tables and leaped along the walls in running patterns of warm mystery.

Isabel in front of the fire reached her feet to the warmth and rested back in the depths of the big leather chair. She gave a sigh of comfort. It had been a harsh day—penetrating chill, and tempers on edge. Even in the swift limousine she had a little shrinking sense of the cutting wind driving past the glass sides of the car.

She was glad to slip into the quiet of the library and rest a while before dressing for dinner. She watched the shadows contentedly and relaxed to the charm of the room. It was a beautiful room—filled with the personality of the owner.

Eben Braithwaite she knew had chosen the furnishings and arranged the room to the smallest detail. Even in his absence something of his presence was there in the room.

There was generous space and smooth surfaces—And where the smoothness was perhaps a little hard

the light of the fire gave it a gracious shining glow.

Not for a moment had Eben Braithwaite made her feel the urgency of his suit. Ten months had slipped by unnoticed while he surrounded her with comfort and practical advice and help. . . .

She had a vague feeling of guilt sitting in front of the leaping fire surrounded by the gracious smoothness of the room. She knew she must tell him . . . dozens of times she had tried—but he put her off gently.

“Wait a little,” he seemed to say. “Don’t decide yet!”

And the next day some new plan for her happiness was under way. . . . It was not right to let him go on—since she knew so well!

She could no longer deceive herself that there was no one else. Months ago she gave up trying to hide it from herself, puzzled and bewildered. . . . Why should a young man, disheveled and grimy, hatless and breathless, become to her suddenly a kind of god—when the same young man immaculately clad was only a foolish youth who wrote poetry—and was comically vain about it?

She had looked at the god, disbelieving and stern—he had countless faults—hundreds of them! But over them all the godhood cast a glamour.

No need to say she would be sensible and firm. . . . It was not a thing you could decide that way apparently! She stared at it.

She wondered if this was what they called love. . . . It was not the feeling she had for Eben Braith-

waite—of that she was sure. That was comfortable and secure and she rested in it. This was restless. It made her very curious about John. It kept her wondering about him constantly—for John had given not the slightest evidence of caring for her. Unless working in the dirt with grimy hands could be called evidence. . . . It was that that had been her undoing—the sudden flashing glimpse and suspicion that he was doing it for her sake.

And after that she could not rest. Each time she saw him she must be looking for glimpses—wondering, ashamed—finally even determined and obstinate to surprise him into revealing something.

But to-day she knew as little as ten months ago.

John Junior went his way smiling and assured. For anything she knew there was no shining god behind the curtain of his good manners. . . . It might be only a dummy god she had imagined for a flashing instant.

She only wanted to be *sure*—then perhaps the unrest would cease. Perhaps if she knew she would not care.

She gazed into the fire going over it. . . . The laundry had prospered beyond expectation. They had enlarged and stretched the old house to its limit. They must have more room and more help. The possibilities were endless. . . . And—she could only keep wondering about John Junior.

She shook herself. She would go and dress for dinner! She turned a little in her chair. From the dim room she could see into the lighted hall.

Some one came out of Eben Braithwaite's office and passed through the hall—a young man. He stopped and turned back. . . . The two figures halted opposite the door and talked a minute in low tones. Eben Braithwaite and——!

Where had she seen the younger man before? She turned it idly a moment and dropped it. . . . Eben Braithwaite's voice came to her from the hall——

“Send it to-night, special delivery— We've got him where we want him this time!” The voice laughed.

He came back along the hall past the open door. But he did not glance into the dimness of the library. There was a little shrewd smile on his lips as he went on to his office and closed the door.

Suddenly the girl before the fire sat up—there was an intent look in her face—Gilbert Carter!

And Gilbert Carter was John Berwick's new secretary! She had wondered about him many times—wondered how he took John Senior's roaring and swearing! She had only seen him once—when Ellen pointed him out on the walk as they drove by.

They were going swiftly. She had only a glimpse—but she was not likely to forget! She had linked him up so keenly with John Senior. It had not seemed to her he was the kind of young man John Senior would get on with— His face was thin and sharp. . . . But he had been with him ten months now. Ellen still was acting as her father's secretary!

She got up and moved to the desk and wrote a note and went quickly up stairs. No one would stop her.

The car had gone to the station for Ellen. She must get away before it came back. . . . She pinned the note to a cushion in the dressing-room and got quickly into her coat and hat, drawing on her gloves as she hurried down the stairs. She would just catch the five-forty if she ran.

Half a mile from the house the lamps of a car flamed on the distant dark. She crowded to the side of the road holding her breath. There was a swift glimpse of Ellen's face against the darkness and the car flashed by. She caught her breath quickly and hurried on. The air was growing cold. Spurting drops of rain fell before she reached the station.

There was no carriage when she left the train at Hanover. She looked about her for a moment and hesitated. Then she took the road to the hill. . . . The wind roared in sweeping gusts—rising fast. It caught her in the face and drove past her, twisting the long coat about her legs.

After the first gasp she tingled with keenness and bent her face to it. She raced on, her head bent and her whole body delighting in the struggle. . . . She had been shut up, suffocated for months it seemed to her. Now in this whirligig of wind she was free—And there was something she could do for John Senior.

The great clouds caught the wind and swirled and marched up the sky. They piled in great masses. But the fury of the storm marshalled there in the dark above her did not break.

The deluge hung. Now and then a swift drop

spilled over and stung her. She laughed under her breath. She should make it. And what did a wetting matter! . . . John Senior's wrath might cool itself in the great storm of wind and rain!

As she neared the house the drops fell fast. They followed her up the driveway in a splashing fury that left her breathless. She laughed and darted up the steps and turned on to the pillared porch facing the storm. It drove past in sheets. The lightning played in the massing clouds— The first thunder-storm of the year. Spring was in the thunder!

She stood a minute watching, exulting in it. Then she turned to the house. The windows at the left of the door were brilliantly lighted and in the room behind two men faced each other across the dinner-table.

She stood holding her breath. It seemed that if she breathed they must turn and see her, she was so close. . . . Yet in the fury of the storm she might have stamped and cried out and they would not have heard.

Once when the roar shook the house John Senior glanced at the blank window. But she knew that his face saw nothing beyond the darkness of the pane.

She watched them talking in pantomime. John Senior's lips were compressed in the little grim line she knew so well. Instinctively she wondered what troubled John Senior.

The other face was smiling. Her eyes sought it again and again. Her hand groped to the bell and

fell back. . . . She could look at him in the darkness. There was no one to see. . . . Yes— The god was there! He was leaning forward speaking quick sharp words—eager words that thrust John Senior aside.

She lifted her hand to the bell and pressed it.

“A lady to see you, sir—” Milton paused discreetly and coughed. The voices were very loud. John Berwick wheeled about.

“What——!”

“A lady, sir— Her name is Merton, she said.”

John Senior’s face betrayed nothing. He turned back in his chair. The nut-cracker in his fingers closed crunching on a shell. He held the pieces in his hand.

“Show her into the library,” he said gruffly.

He picked a little at the crushed nut.

“What does she want?” he asked John Junior. The son laughed gently.

“Do you think *I* know?”

His father sent a keen look.

“No reason, I suppose?”

A line of red ran across the young man’s face. His lip trembled. He made no reply.

His father’s glance fell.

“Um-m!” he said after a minute.

The young man was watching him intently—as if he held to a single purpose.

“You see Milton called her a ‘lady,’” he said quietly.

"I didn't say she's not a lady—a sort of lady," replied John Senior. "I meant she's not the million-dollar kind of lady—like Ellen Braithwaite. There's a lady for you!" The enthusiasm in his voice was almost reverent. The son leaned forward. His eyes were filled with humorous affection——

"Why don't you speak for yourself, dad?" he said softly.

John Senior stared. He laid down his napkin and got up.

"Humph!" he said.

Then, as he neared the door——

"Don't be a fool!" he said over his shoulder.

XLIV

ISABEL MERTON looked up.

“Well?” said John Senior. His hands were thrust in his pockets.

She stood with a little flush.

“I know you are angry with me.”

“What have you come about?” he growled.

“What’s John been up to—foolishness?” He stared at her keenly.

The flush in her face deepened. Then the light of mischief flashed across it—

“Not John Junior,” she said quietly.

He continued to look at her.

A grim smile touched his lip.

“Sit down,” he said.

He felt a sudden deep relief. She was right. He was more of a fool than John Junior. The boy was all right—and so was she.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Carter— Is he still working for you?”

“Pretending to,” said John Senior.

“He’s working for Eben Braithwaite, too,” she said quickly.

John Senior stared at her a few minutes in silence.

“How do you know?” he asked.

“I guessed— I saw them talking together—not an hour ago. I put on my bonnet and ran!” She

laughed. "I couldn't stand the idea of their doing you like that—and no one to take care of you!"

"You're a good girl, Bel!" he said after a minute. She flushed with quick pleasure.

"It's a good while since you said that to me!"

He nodded. "About a year, isn't it? Seems like forty! . . . Well, I'm going to tell you something—" He smiled again, the grim smile, and nodded.

"Braithwaite planted Carter on me and he's been keeping tally right along."

"You've known!" she gasped.

"I've double-crossed him pretty well!" he assented. "It is such a nice little game for Braithwaite I haven't had the heart to break it up. . . . It's been hard on me part of the time, figuring to play up to him—keep him guessing. But I've done it all right. Hodgkins helped," he added dryly.

She laughed gently. Then the humor of it overflowed her. He watched her, nodding.

"I knew you'd enjoy it!" he said. "I've thought a good many times I'd like to have you know. You understand a man, Bel!—How's the laundry business?" he said abruptly.

"Good!"

"Making money?"

"Yes—I guess so."

"Don't you know?" he demanded sternly.

"Of course. . . . Only we're making too much money!"

"What do you mean?"

"We've got to expand and build and—" She spread out her hands. "That means more money—always more!"

"Business!" said John Senior reverently. He looked at her approvingly.

"And more of your girls," she continued.

He smiled serenely. "You're welcome to 'em. The Greeks are all right. There's enough for us both—Greeks and Poles—just as you said there would be." His eyes twinkled at her.

"Suppose I take them all?" she said thoughtfully. He regarded her a minute.

"It won't hurt me any," he replied significantly.

"It will just hurt John Junior—that's all!"

She looked up quickly. He nodded.

"I'm going to turn the silk-mill over to John. . . . I'm worth two-three millions, Bel!"

The room seemed to expand to take it in—the exaltation of it.

"And by the way—" He looked at her with assumed carelessness— "There's a little dividend due you! . . . I put some stock in your name that time you got a raise out of me!" He chuckled.

"There's a few thousand coming to you. I'll write a check for it now—if you like," He got up. "And then we'll have the car take you home. Awful night for you to be out—" He looked at her kindly and motioned to the windows where the rain was still coming down. . . . He took her hands a minute and looked at her.

"You're a good girl!" he said. "You take this

money and build up your laundry—and if there's any more help wanted you come to *me*. . . . I understand Eben Braithwaite's been helping you some. I wouldn't keep that up. You better let me help you after this."

He went toward the door. He looked back.

"You wait a minute," he said. "I'll make out that check. Then we'll take you home."

XLV

SHE leaned back in her chair with a little quick sigh. She seemed to have come far through the storm. She was back again with John Senior in the old trusted way. How good it was—and Eben Braithwaite was misty, unreal—a dream. . . . She closed her eyes resting. The rain beat on the window. She heard it dully behind the thick curtains there—and here by the fire she was warm and safe.

She opened her eyes slowly. A presence seemed in the room—a white-faced woman looking down at her with hungry eyes. . . . She felt the warmth of the little rain-coat wrapping her about—all the charm of it and the wonder—and the little thread of scarlet running through it. . . . Slowly it came to her in the big empty room—the rain-coat had sheltered her and waked her to beauty.

There were tears behind the closed lids and there was a little ache in her heart for the woman's white face and loneliness.

She knew the heartache—for children unborn and for children dead. The tears behind the lids welled——

The eyes flashed open and stared a little. . . .

There where the white face had bent to her in loneliness and longing—a young man stood, a wistful smile on his lips——

“Isabel!” he said softly. . . . “Isabel!”

“Isabel and a pot of basil.” She heard the echo of dream-words and put out her hand.

He knelt by her looking up, waiting.

She took his face in her hands, the tears on her cheeks unheeded.

Outside, the rain beat down. The wind was driving across the hill and he reached up and drew her against him.

The poet in him sang——

In the doorway John Senior coughed discreetly. He came over and laid a hand on the quick-lifted heads. Tears were close behind the little twinkle in his voice.

“There—there! Bless you, children!”

He was looking at Isabel and smiling. He bent and kissed the tears on her cheeks with a little fatherly gesture——

“Nothing to cry about!” he said gently. . . .
“We are all happy now!”

A white face drifted across Isabel’s vision and faded in the room. . . . Outside, a horn sounded—muffled in the rain.

John Senior looked up. “Sturgis,” he said. “He’s ready to take you home.”

“I’m going with her!” said John Junior quickly. He was on his feet and smiling down at her proudly. But his father put out a hand.

“I’m taking Isabel home myself,” he said quietly.

“But father——!”

"No 'buts,' Johnnie!— Not a 'but!' I want to use the car myself. If I let you take her home I might not get it back for hours!"

So, bare-headed in the rain John Junior took her to the car. . . . At the foot of the steps they paused and turned looking toward the town—

The rain had nearly ceased. Only a few drops fell. Over the town hung a curious misty light that grew and changed as they looked. The clouds were luminous— Slowly, above the horizon, an arch of color glowed on the sky.

John Senior descending the steps behind them paused—

"A lunar rainbow!" he said wonderingly. "It's a sign of luck, they say. You don't often see a bow like that!"

They stood with faces lifted to it, watching the color grow till an arch hung perfect in the sky, a faint elusive wonder shining from moonlit drops.

Isabel's face quivered. Life swept by her—and in the high-hung bow she saw it gleam and glow with color and fade into the sky. . . . The clouds grew silver-edged. The moon flooded from behind them and shone on the waiting car.

John Junior put her in and tucked the robe about her. He bent forward and kissed the face that trembled toward him in the dimness.

"There—there!" said John Senior huskily. "Drive on, Sturgis!"

And the car sped swift-rolling down the hill—
where the little rain-coat had gone speeding, flapping
against stout-flying legs and covering the happy
heart of a child.

XLVI

"WHAT made you wait so long, John?" Ellen Braithwaite drew back from him with the little slow amused smile. . . . "Why didn't you speak for yourself—the other night!"

"I didn't know the other night," he said stoutly. "I thought you were way up above me!" He seemed to see her on her heights. "My son might be good enough—but not *me!*"

"And I was right, too— I'm not good enough for you. But if you say you'll have me you will never regret it, Ellen. . . . I'm not a fool. I'll learn. I'll change——"

"Don't change too much!" she laughed. "I like you, just as you are, you know!"

His face grew humble and wistful. "I know how you mean that, dear—but I don't want to be just a kind of clown to you. I want to stand alongside and protect you—and understand you." He said the last words under his breath.

She held out a hand.

"No one will ever understand me as you do," she said swiftly. "We belong to each other. We belong to a different time from this new generation. We want beauty and power and the heaped-up riches of the earth!" She laughed softly.

"The heaped-up riches of the earth!" she repeated

gently. "They are willing to risk everything—throw it aside—to live with each other—and an idea!" She seemed to hold it off and look at it thoughtfully.

"I told Bel she was a regular Bolshevik!" said John Senior dryly.

"No. It isn't the giving-up they want—nor the making other people give up— It's just the chance to *work together*. I know. I can see it. . . . But I don't *dare!*" She spoke almost in a whisper.

"If you take me, John, you must know me through and through. I want beautiful things. I cannot give them up—just for the joy of living in people—the way Isabel does. She belongs to the new day.

"I am the old!"

"The old day is not done with just yet!" said John Senior.

"Not by a long shot!" he added after a minute.

"They think they are going to make over the world in a day or so. But there'll be a good many hard knocks before they get it fixed up to suit 'em. We'll hang on to a little good money for 'em—and a few other good things."

"They may come in handy later on—for the children, you know!" he explained dryly.

She shook her head.

"No, you're wrong! They won't ask our help. They have the secret—the new life. It belongs to them. They have given up our gold for it—and they are glad—glad—glad! Oh, I know. I can see. . . . But I cannot go with them. So I have you!" She

held out her hand to him, and John Senior took it almost reverently and held it in his.

“I’m glad you think you need me,” he said simply. “I’d be pretty lonely in this new-fangled time if there wasn’t somebody needed me—and understood I’ve done the best I could about making the money.

“You’ll help me spend it right!” He was looking at her with shrewd admiring eyes.

She returned the look slowly—and John Senior saw suddenly that there was admiration in the gaze meeting his so steadily.

He stared at it surprised and unbelieving. He shook his head.

She smiled gently.

“There is one thing—with all their wisdom—they haven’t found out yet!” she said quietly. “They don’t know that when the new day comes there will be no more men like you!”

She put her hands on his shoulders. She was taller than he, but she did not look down on him. She seemed to draw him to her height. . . . He felt for a minute that he overlooked the world. . . . The new day was hidden behind the veiling mists, but whatever might come John Senior knew for a moment, and knew to the utmost, that life was good.

XLVII

THE two o'clock train drew in to the station at Hanover and James Murphy, of Dart and Company, stepped onto the platform.

It was nearly two years since he jotted down on his memo-pad— "When in vicinity Hanover— look up young woman— Merton" . . . He had not thought that two years would go by before he would be in the vicinity of Hanover.

He looked at his watch and replaced it quickly. Ten minutes late. He would have time to see this Miss Merton, engage her if things developed, and catch the three o'clock that connected at the junction with the train for Boston.

An expressman on the platform directing the work of two men who were raking the ground at the side of the building, turned an appraising glance as Murphy put his question—

"Miss Isabel Merton?" he repeated. "No such person in town." There was a little quizzical twinkle under the visor of the express cap.

"Where has she moved to?" asked Murphy quickly.

"She hasn't 'moved' exactly," answered the man. "She's married." The twinkle under the visor deepened.

James Murphy ignored it. "No train before three, I suppose?" he said shortly.

"No, sir— Due three-five." He gave a direction to the men who were raking and turned away.

Murphy walked to the end of the platform and stood looking down the shining tracks to the junction. . . . He might have known! They always marry—the best ones!

He strolled back along the platform and stood idly watching the men at work.

"What are you going to do with it?" he asked the expressman.

"Seed it down—put in shrubs. . . . She said we'd have flowers, too," he added dubiously. "I do' no' about that. I guess some of the women will tend to it." They stood watching the even sweep of the rakes.

"You going to see her?" he asked.

"Who?" inquired Murphy with indifferent glance.

"You was asking about Miss Merton, wa'n't you? She's helping plan this—" He moved a hand to the rakes.

Murphy cast a glance along the tracks leading to the junction— Nothing to do or see!

"How far is it? Where do I find her?"

The man scratched his head and tilted the cap a little forward.

"Hard telling—I guess perhaps you'd find her at the laundry about this time."

Murphy stared.

"Laundry?" He turned quickly. "You mean she's working?"

"You bet!" replied the man cheerfully.

Murphy's heart leaped . . . he could offer higher wages than a laundry would pay. Let her bring her husband along—bring the whole family! He smiled.

"Where is this place?" he asked—"This laundry?"

"First side street—just off Main," said the man.
"You can't miss it."

Murphy thanked him and sprinted. He had waited five minutes but he could still make it. Things were coming his way!

He noted with quick eye as he hurried along that Hanover was a tidy place—yards raked, walks edged with clean-cut turf, and flower-beds . . . all the difference between a well-dressed woman and a slattern. He had not expected Hanover would be such a trim little place.

The young woman who answered his ring looked him over coolly. She wore a white muslin cap with the Puritan corners turned well back, and a large white apron that covered her trim person from head to foot.

"I am looking for a young woman who was Miss Isabel Merton—" he said. "You were not perhaps Miss Merton?"

She gave a crisp little laugh. "No such luck! My name is Hodgkins. What can I do for you?"

"I wanted to see her," replied the man. "Miss Isabel Merton—before she married."

Fannie Hodgkins smiled slightly.

"Well— Come in. She's busy. But I'll see."
She ushered him into the room at the right of

the hall and left him. He looked about him with quick glance. The low-ceiled room filled with sunlight and the wicker furniture upholstered in chintz had a homelike air. There were flowers on the table and a fire burned in the old fireplace under a panelled mantel.

"A—laundry!" murmured James Murphy.

He seated himself by the fire.

He wondered a little what he would have to pay her. The homelike room flashed a doubt to him whether it might not be a little more than he had counted on.

A woman stood in the doorway, looking in. Her white cap and apron covered her completely, but the hair under the cap glinted and the whiteness of the apron seemed to come from some inner source and surround her with light. She regarded him quietly as she came forward.

He was on his feet. "My name is Murphy," he said quickly. "Of Dart and Company."

"Oh!" The question in her face relaxed. "You have the wrong place. It is my father, Aaron Merton, you want—the third shop to the right on Main Street."

He shook his head. "No. I wanted you— You sent us an order for goods—over a year ago?"

"Yes," she admitted, "I did." She smiled. . . . Aaron Merton and the back-room and the dancing circle of girls were in the smile. He regarded it with courage. . . . His luck was holding!

"That order interested me very much," he said.

"It interested me," she replied. The smile of happiness lingered in her words.

"How long have you been working here—for these people?" he asked abruptly.

"How long?" Her face held it a moment while she thought— "It is nearly sixteen months—since I began."

"Pay well?" he pursued.

She leaned forward with a quick look— "You are interested in the laundry?" she asked.

"I am interested in your connection with it—yes."

"It's an experiment, of course," she said intently. "But it is going well— I am almost afraid some days— It doesn't seem as if it could keep on like this! We had sixteen hampers from outside last week, parcels-post, and express." The stars were glowing under the cap and electric forces danced in the room. They collided with James Murphy. He sat up.

The Celt in him awoke.

"I'm on the wrong track!" he said dryly. "Would you kindly explain to me—just what this is?" He moved a hand at the sun-filled room. The gesture took in, with a little touch of deference, the white-clad figure before him.

"Would you like to see the Laundry?" she asked.

"Very much!" he replied emphatically.

She led him through the rooms where the girls were working.

In the yard outside, the fruit trees were in bloom. The spicy scent drifted to him as they crossed to the

new building beyond, and the hum of bees came with the scent of blossoms. . . . James Murphy was puzzling it out. . . . This woman was not the boss. He felt sure of that.

Two girls discussing something drew her aside for a moment and she spoke a word or two and joined him again.

The place moved to something steady—that you could not put your finger on. There was steam and suds— Clothes stretching away on the lines beyond the fruit trees. . . . And over it and under it the humming of the bees.

She stood under the trees looking up. The shadows touched her white cap.

“We are going to add a canning-room in the fall,” she said, “for fruit. One of the girls wants to try it.”

He stared a little—and added it to the collection in his mind.

“We shall have two new buildings next year and a central heating plant,” she went on. “That will simplify things.” She led him back through the house to the hall.

A sound floated down the stairs—a child crying and quickly soothed. Then the sound of the mother’s voice laughing in broken words.

She nodded to his glance of inquiry. “Mrs. Hodgkins lives up-stairs,” she said.

She moved with him toward the door that opened onto the street. He ignored the open door and turned to her.

"If you can spare me ten minutes more I shall be grateful to you. There are things I want to ask."

She led the way with a smile to the room on the right.

"Come in," she said.

The ten minutes lengthened to twenty—an hour—two hours. And James Murphy continued to sit in the homelike room. They had probed the laundry and the town and ranged through social ethics and economy and back to the laundry again. What James Murphy had been thinking of for years, this young woman was doing apparently with no other guide than common-sense and intuition. . . . Perhaps they were the same thing, he thought for a gleaming minute. . . . She had no theories about it evidently— She merely did things.

"I shall give up the laundry in the fall," she was saying. "They do not need me now—except as the laundry needs everybody. I am going to work on something else— The Hanover market for fruit and vegetables!" She said it happily and the look in her face deepened to a glow. . . .

"Can't you see it growing?" she said. "With motor-trucks and parcels-post we can supply a radius of fifty miles—daily delivery to homes and stores. We have such big farms to draw from! And when we get to working together—!" She spread her hands. "I can hardly wait!" The laugh in her voice trembled subtly. "And then when that is started we will go on to something else! Mrs.

Hodgkins is talking about the right kind of schools. She never went to school herself after she was twelve. But she wants Hanover made over for her boy!" She laughed happily.

James Murphy looked at her. His glance was thoughtful.

"I wonder if that is the weak point?" he said slowly.

"What is—the weak point?" she asked.

"That you women will always want change—one thing this year—another next." He smiled a little grimly. Dart and Company's board of directors flashed staidly before him.

"No stability— Always shifting!" he said with a laugh.

She held it a minute.

"I wonder—too," she said thoughtfully. "But we must work it out as we go. . . . That's the way—plan as you go—and trust it!"

"Amen!" said James Murphy quickly. He sat up.

"I wonder," she went on, "whether it is because women *do* change and want to change and need it—whether that is the reason they do some things better than men. The girls here seem to want to go from one part of the work to another—almost as they change fashions in the spring and fall. . . . I don't know that they work any better or any worse for it. I can't tell— But down underneath I know things are different—something happy keeps bubbling up. . . . It seems almost as if we grew with

the things we keep trying to do." She sat considering it.

"I have never talked about it with any one. No one here is interested in talking, I guess. But the things you have said make me see—as if I knew things were coming. . . . As if we had all been getting ready for something without knowing it."

"Perhaps the things women will do best are the cities and towns," she went on. "They are just bigger homes and families—" She laughed out. "Towns need bigger wash-tubs and dish-pans; that's all!" she added quickly. "Now that men have continents and nations to take care of perhaps we shall have to stretch our housekeeping a little—make it cover whole towns and do a few cities. . . . It is the kind of work we've always had to do and liked doing—one thing to-day, another to-morrow, and all sorts of detail to manage."

He was leaning back, watching her. Here was something the Celt in him understood—something Dart and Company with their systematized business and efficiency had not touched.

"It is the same with men, I suspect," he said slowly. "Only, as you put it, they are going to have nations and continents to handle. . . . The interest in growing work that went with the farm has been crowded out of mills and factories. They do the same old thing over and over. . . . We've got to get back somehow to growing work. Through group-planning perhaps, building together—the way men built the old cathedrals—every man a part of

the vision as it grew. . . . We'll build continents yet!" There was a glow in the quick words. She nodded quietly.

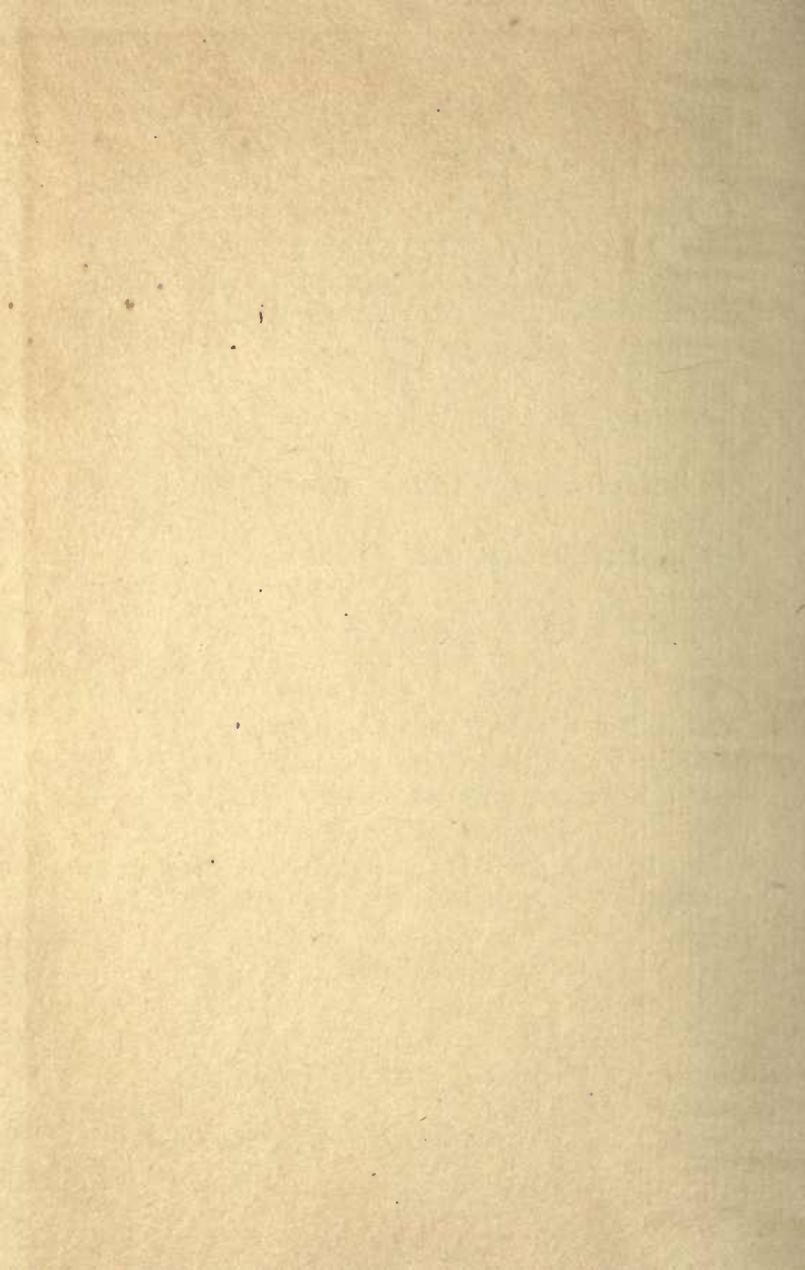
"And women will keep the fires alive at home—cities and towns! Perhaps that is why we were thrust out into business through the war—and through everything—getting ready to move together when the time comes. . . . There will be thousands of women to carry on the peace the war has won."

There was a sound in the hall. She turned with a smile that waited—

"Isabel!" It was a man's voice, quick and imperious.

"It is my husband!" She went to the door and passed into the hall.

In the homelike room James Murphy, Manager of the Employment Department of Dart and Company, sat and dreamed in his chintz-covered chair. . . . He saw cities and towns marshal before him. He felt the swift steady rhythm of life. Nations at play—men and women working together, hands joined, their faces lifted in the dawn. . . . And under and over and around, through the open windows, sounded the murmuring song of the bees.



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